

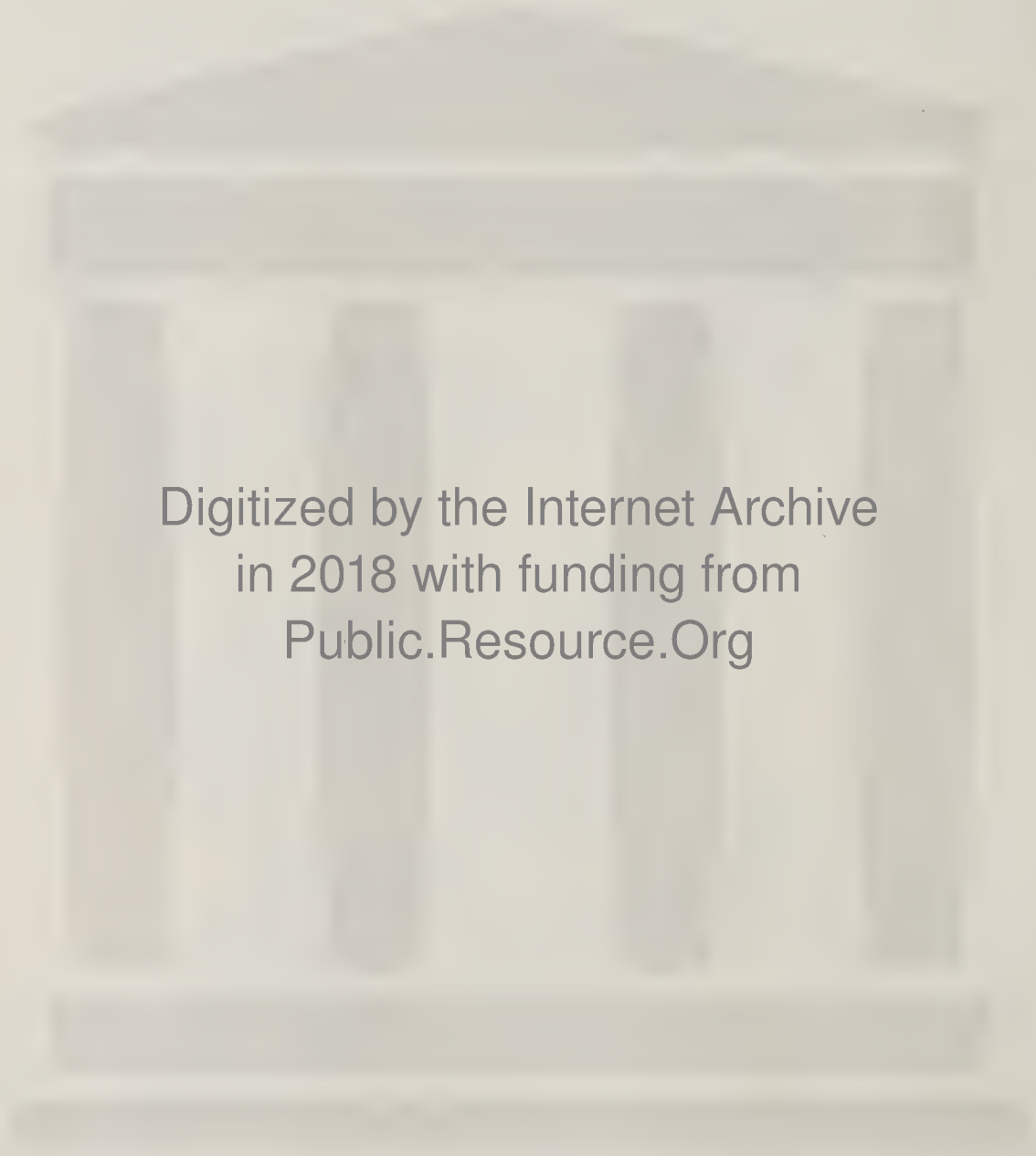
BUILDERS
OF
MODERN
INDIA

V.O. Chidambaram Pillai

**R.N. SAMPATH
and
Pe. Su. MANI**



V.O. Chidambaram Pillai



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About the Series

THE OBJECT OF the series is the publication of biographies of those eminent sons and daughters of India who have been mainly instrumental in our national renaissance and the struggle for independence.

It is essential for the present and coming generations to know something about these men and women. Except in a few cases, no authoritative biographies are available. The series has been planned to remove this lacuna and comprise handy volumes containing simple and short biographies of our eminent leaders written by competent persons who know their subject well. The books in this series are of 200 to 300 pages each and are not intended either to be comprehensive studies or to replace more elaborate biographies.

Though desirable, it may not be possible to publish the biographies in chronological order. The work of writing these lives has to be entrusted to persons who are well equipped to do so and therefore, for practical reasons, it is possible that there might be no historical sequences observed. It is hoped, however, that within a short period all eminent national personalities will figure in this series.

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Foreword

A BIOGRAPHY IN English with authenticated source material about the great patriot V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, was a long-felt desideratum.

“Kappalottiya Thamizhan”—a small and popular Tamil work of mine was translated into English and published in 1972 and that had been the only work in English about V.O. Chidambaram so far. The present work is a full-fledged biography of the patriot from Tirunelveli region of Tamil Nadu, in English.

In fact, my book “Kappalottiya Thamizhan” in Tamil, brought out in 1944 was the first ever book on V.O.C. It did help many people to know about V.O.C. and had enthused many to write on him subsequently, all in Tamil. To bring to the knowledge of the mass of Tamil Nadu, I arranged many meetings and Conferences in which I spoke about V.O.C. stressing the valuable contributions of his, to the political scene apart from Tamil and Saiva Siddhanta. I did that all, with a missionary zeal.

In 1946, I founded the “Tamilarasu Kazhagam”, a party to propagate and resuscitate the Tamil language and culture in all its spheres to all Tamilians with an accent on Indian nationalism. Later, I started a journal “Sengol”. I made full use of these two organs to popularise V.O.C’s life and services. Every year, on November 18, the day of the patriot’s demise memorial meetings were held at almost all places of Tamil Nadu under the banner of the “Tamilarasu Kazhagam”. Special numbers were brought out in honour of the departed leader by the journal of the Party.

But, all these efforts of mine were confined to Tamil Nadu only. Now, I am sure and certain that the present publication will reach vaster and wider areas and enable all to know more about the patriot.

I have known very well the authors of this book—Dr. R.N. Sampath and Sri Pe. Su. Mani. The former, a scholar in Sanskrit, is a retired Professor from Presidency College, Madras. The latter, a diligent critic, is much interested in bringing out works on Tamil authors and politicians and other topics like freedom struggle which he presents with authentic historical background.

More often his works may throw information which otherwise might have been not known to many. I have known him for the past thirty years as a freelance writer and his literary services to Mahakavi Bharati have attracted me very much.

The joining together of these two persons to write the biography of V.O.C. is itself commendable and a perusal of this work will convince all, how a daring fighter for freedom for the Motherland from far off South, has been presented in the national perspective. In their joint venture, a harmonious coexistence and intertwining of Tamil, Sanskrit and English have taken place for advantage to all. It will not be out of place if I recommend this book for study in the under-graduate courses in all colleges so that the young and impressive minds could be imbued with patriotic spirit and fervour, apart from knowing a portion of the freedom struggle.

In ten Chapters with telling captions, the volume presents V.O.C. as a great and dauntless political leader of his time, apart from being a pioneer in Trade Unionism in South India, a versatile scholar and a good critic of Tamil language and literature and Saiva Siddhanta philosophy.

The Government of India deserves our thanks for publishing the biography of the great savants of India, under the 'Builders of India' Scheme, through the Information and Broadcasting Department. It is a noble task indeed which will enable the young readers to stimulate their fine sensibilities in the right direction of national participation and nation-building activities.

This volume is no doubt a good addition to the political biography section and a homage paid to the great and versatile patriot of Tamil Nadu.

I hope and trust the twin authors will bring forth many such publications in future too.

Ma. Po. Sivagnanam

The Shaping of the Challenge

IN THE HISTORY of a nation, centuries do not matter. More vital and necessary are the challenges the people had faced in the long corridor of time, the ready resilience they mustered, the ambitions and aspirations they cherished and practised, the disappointments and frustrations they digested, and the love and respect they had unremittingly offered to the land of their birth which they desired their posterity to uphold as the priceless heirloom. India is an ancient country in which the spiritual and traditional sentiments had always been helpful to the idea of considering this land as a “holy land”. It may be true that the modern idea of nationalism and patriotism might not have existed in the bygone days, yet in the passage of time coming into contact with different races of people that spirit too has been imbibed. The fact that Indians are second to none in the patriotic spirit in times of dire necessity had been evinced on more than one occasion. This book has its theme, the calibre and capacity of a nationalist and patriot hailing from far down south of this peninsula and he was V.O. Chidambaram Pillai who had given his all for the cause of the freedom of the nation from the foreign yoke.

It was on 27 May 1498 that for the first time a European had landed at Kappadu on the West Malabar Coast. He was the Portuguese Vasco-da-gama who arrived in his flag-ship—*San Gabriel* and thus initiated the wave of Western mariners to land on the Indian soil first with commercial motives and later with ambitious programmes. On 15 August 1947, Lord Mountbatten hoisted the Tricolour National Flag and saluted it thus marking the end of a foreign domination and exploitation and the beginning of a Free India to work out a new era for the most ancient India which Jawaharlal Nehru the first Prime Minister termed as “tryst with destiny”. In between these two crucial dates many things had happened. In the span of 449 years, India had to meet many tests and manifold challenges.

Following Vasco-da-gama's trip to India, many English and European trade groups had India as their goal. Following the Portugal group, in 1600 the British East India Company, in 1602 the Dutch East India Company and in 1644 the French Company marched like a caravan towards India and the East with commercial motives.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda the position becomes clear. In 1806, he, in an interview to the newspaper *India-London* of London, averred "In the past Europe had struggled for Indian trade—a trade which had played a tremendous part in the civilization of the world. Its acquisition might almost be called a turning point in the history of humanity."

Settling themselves well on the Indian soil, these foreign business communities got interested and involved themselves in the internal feuds that existed among the numerous native rulers and princes and slowly exercised an authoritarian influence over them, thus using the native powers as pawns in the chess game of political and administrative spheres. This is how the commercial motivation transferred itself into political one and paved the way for colonial domination. In this rat race of power, Britain asserted itself as a dominant colonial force enabling Winston Churchill to proudly proclaim, "In the British Empire the Sun never sets."

Prophetic it may appear, the words of Siraj-u-daula the Nawab of Bengal to his son in 1756 as a piece of advice regarding the British. He said: "The hearts of the English are given up to the love of gold and lust of power and their actions have shown to all the East, how little they heed the precepts they have received from God. Their politics and their power are in opposition to their faith. Once again, I tell you oh my son, crush the English. If you allow them to have in your land factories and soldiers, the country you rule will be soon theirs." But situation too conspired. Karl Marx wrote in one of his articles the method through which the British established their Supremacy in India. One of the important factors was the decay of the country. As Karl Marx put it, "The paramount power of the great Moghals was broken by the Moghal Viceroy. The power of the Viceroy was broken by the Maharattas. The power of the Maharattas was broken by the Afghans and while all were struggling, the British rushed in and were enabled to subdue all."

Although India had seen and encountered a larger number of foreign incursions, the eighteenth century pushed India to a new and irreversible fixture. In the words of the great historian Arnold Toynbee the situation was clear:

“In India’s encounter with the West, there has been one experience that has not been shared with India by any other society in the world... not merely conquered by Western arms but ruled after that by Western administrators.... In the eighteenth century when the Moghal-Muslim Raj was breaking up, there were moments when it looked as if it was going to be followed immediately by the establishment of Hindu successor-States. In the eighteenth century scramble for the Moghal heritage, a Maratha Hindu power seemed for a time to be well on the way of winning the lion’s share of spoils. The eighteenth century attempt to transform the Moghal Raj into a Maratha Hindu Raj was foiled by the intervention of a more powerful Western hand.”

In the history of India another turning point occurred in 1857. Under the leadership of the last Moghal ruler Bhadur Shah, the Hindu and Muslim vassals, Kings and soldiers unitedly rose against the foreign administration. But it was suppressed with brutal measures. The administration by the Board of Directors of the East India Company was taken over by the Crown and its administration would not interfere with the faith and beliefs of the people and assured that enough opportunities would be thrown open to the Indians too in the administrative set-up. This paved the way for the English pattern of Education and the English-knowing Indians got a better social recognition and esteem amidst their countrymen.

Cultural Awakenings and Organisations

The study of English and the Literature together with allied subjects brought an awareness of political concepts imbibed by the English-studied Indians. The pattern of education and the administrative set-up brought a discipline throughout India and under one powerful authority. In other words India became a political unit because of the administrative set-up of the British. As a result of this new impact of social customs and religious faiths and the allurements of the people to this new culture set-ups, an awakening had taken place in the minds of thoughtful persons

who valued more the ancient wisdom and culture of India than anything else. Some had even cautiously warned their compatriots about the culture and wisdom of India. To counter the trend of sheepish following to the Western way of life and behaviour, many a cultural organisations rose up to create an awakening in their people about the glories of their past.

In Europe, the renaissance movement from Italy and reformist movement from Germany did much to arouse and enthuse the cultural regeneration to a large extent. As a by-product of this, the national spirit and its awareness too emerged. Similarly in India in the nineteenth century many a cultural movement arose and they in turn helped the development of political nationalism and patriotic spirit with the backdrop of cultural moorings being not neglected.

India is a land of religions. As Nehru said in his *Discovery of India* "Religion was a dominating form of ideology for many centuries. Even Philosophy had to serve religion. That is why nationalism in India, in its early stage of formation and development, tried to express itself through the media of various religious concepts and through religious reforms."

Among the many big and small movements, the following nine are worth noting since they left deep influences on the national political sphere too. (1) The Brahmo Samaj (2) The Prarthana Samaj (3) The Arya Samaj (4) The Theosophical Society (5) Ramakrishna Mission (6) Wahabi Movement; (7) Aligarh Movement (8) Darul-uloom Deoband (1879) and (9) Ahmadia Movement.

1. Brahmo Samaj

The one person who created an atmosphere for the emergence of such movement was Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1883) who was called "the morning star of Indian Renaissance". Through starting a series of journals in different languages viz., *Sambad Kaumudi* in Bengali (1822) *Mirut-ul-Akbar* in Persian (1822), *Brahmanical Magazine* in English and *Banga Doot* in Hindi, he propagated the religious and social reforms. Besides, through small pamphlets he provoked the people to participate in the discussions, and he was the first Indian to venture into pamphleteering to shape the public opinion, incidentally training

the public in the art of expression regarding public causes and public issues. At that time in *Tols* and *Pathasalas*, Sanskrit was the medium and Persian in Muslim *Madarasas*. These two languages mainly catered to the religious needs. Understanding the incompleteness of these media to deliver the needed goods for secular aspects like politics, arithmetics etc., Rammohan Roy paved the way for the introduction of English teaching in schools. Being aware that around the world there was an urge for freedom and democratic forms of government from feudal system, Rammohan Roy felt such an awareness must be created in the minds of Indians too. In a letter (18.1.1816) to his friend-journalist James Silk Buckingham, Roy pointed out, "the existing system of education in India is not conducive for social welfare, uplift of weaker sections of society and political understanding. I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interest. The distinction of castes introducing innumerable divisions and subdivisions among them has entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification have totally disqualified them from undertaking any difficult enterprises."

Hence Rammohan Roy firmly believed that a new approach to education alone could solve the problem and so he strongly advocated the anglicised pattern of education. In his last days he wrote a letter to his journalist friend Prasanna Kumar Thakur which was published in *Reformer*. It ran as follows:

"So far as political knowledge is concerned we Indians are not equal to the English. So we must practise patience and understanding tendency. We must not be hasty or impatient in improving our lot. The progress that is got step by step is long enduring and stable. Discrimination will abjure no doubt servitude under an alien master with political dependence. The present circumstances available in India and with an interest for benefit of our nation, warrant co-operation with the British, which is worthwhile and shall become wholesome. It shall in the long run help us reap rich dividends."

Precisely in the same tone and with equal sentiment, the same advice was offered by the Moderates in the National Congress Party too at a later date.

The concept of *Brahman* as the ultimate Truth or Reality as found expounded in the *Upanishads* was adopted as a backdrop and support for this movement by Rammohan Roy, The Samaj which was started on 20 August 1818 by Rammohan split up later into three independent sections as Adi Brahmo Samaj; Brahmo Samaj of India; and Sadharana Brahmo Samaj. Devendranath Tagore, Keshav Chandra Sen and Pandit Shivrath Shastri were the respective leaders and propagators of the three sections respectively. The Brahmo Samaj movement as such was noted with warm feelings in a Russian newspaper *St. Peterburgsky-Ved-Omosti* by Vladvil in an issue of 16 October 1882.

“A new intellectual movement had already started in India and in the light of the progress achieved in a short time it has a rich and bright future.” It is interesting to note that apart from this newspaper other Russian journals carried short biographical sketches of Rammohan Roy, Dwarkanath Tagore, Keshav Chandra Sen and others. Members of the Sadharana Samaj, a large number of them, took keen interest in the Creed of Democratic Freedom. In fact more information regarding the details of participation in the National Freedom struggle by the Brahmo Samajists can be had from the book *Brahmo Samaj-Indian Freedom Movement* by Bipin Chandra Pal, a staunch and ardent Brahmo-Samajist.

2. *Prarthana Samaj*

The Prarthana Samaj was started in 1867 in Bombay as an echo of Brahmo Samaj. Mahadeo Govinda Ranade, R.G. Bhandarkar and other stalwarts of Bombay were the pillars to this movement.

Subodha-Patrika—an organ to propagate the tenets of this Samaj was started in 1873 and contained articles in three languages—Marathi, Gujarati and English. This Samaj mainly interested itself in conducting meetings and conferences to reform the social inhibitions and debilities. Ranade, Narayana Ganesh Chandavarkar and other leading members of this Samaj participated in the Congress movement vigorously.

3. *Arya Samaj*

Swami Dayanand Saraswathi (1824-1883) was the Chief Architect of this movement. He found new Truths in the hymns of

the *Rig Veda* and wrote a commentary on them. These formed the basic principles of this movement. The formation of this movement was in Bombay (10.4.1875) but the field of activity got changed to Punjab. The objectives of this movement were two-fold—to protect the Hindu *Dharma* as found and revealed in the *Vedas* and to give effective counter-blow to the detractors and opponents of Hindu faith.

The twin-principles and practice of *Suddhi* (Purification) and *Sanghatan* (Union) became popular, mass based and attractive. Swami's *Satyartha Prakash* in Hindi is the most authoritative guide book for the Arya Samajists. This movement stands against superstitions, priesthood agency, Idol-worship, casteism, untouchability and ill-treatment to women. The samaj has translated the *Vedas* into regional languages and brought the contents to the doors of the common man. Their slogan is "Back to the glorious Vedic days". The movement proudly asserts that the ancient culture and religion of India were not inferior to any other religion and culture in the world and in fact every Indian should be proud of inheriting such a heirloom which happens incidentally to be the most ancient, sober and humane in its theme and content. This movement was in a way pioneer in the field of advocating national education fitting to the Indian context and psychology. Learning, godly feeling and patriotism constitute the main features of their educational policy. Though Swami Dayanand was not directly connected with political activities, yet he was instrumental in inculcating the spirit of nationalism and patriotism. He termed India as "Svarna Bhumi (Golden Land), "Aryavarta" (land of noblemen), and inculcated reverence and regard to the land of our birth in the minds of all. It is said that he was regretting that an unrestricted, free, fearless and self-reliant administration was not in the country. He always spoke that a prayerful approach to God for the freedom of India must be undertaken by one and all. In the sixth chapter of *Satyartha Prakash*, he writes "even though the foreign administration may be neutral without any religious or any other kind of bias in treatment amidst natives and foreigners and be just, kind and helpful, yet it may not give full pleasure and satisfaction to the people of India." The Arya Samajists toured throughout the country and propagated the need for love towards one's own country of birth and adherence to protect her sanctity. Lala

Lajpat Rai, Swami Sraddhananda and a few other of that type were the gifts of Arya Samaj to the Nation. Aravind Ghosh in his work *Bankim, Dayanand, Tilak*, has praised Dayanada Swami as one who had resurrected the spirit of nationalism and spiritualism from its slumber and made that up-to-date by uniting that with modern needs.

4. *Theosophical Society*

The word Theosophy is from two Greek words, “Theos” and “Sophia”—the first meaning God and the second knowledge. Though this movement originated outside Hindu religious set-up yet it has propagated the Hindu religious and spiritual principles and truths throughout the world through journals, pamphlets, and religious meetings or classes. Madam Blavatsky the Russian lady and Col. Henry Steel Olcott of America, the propounders of this movement, got in touch with Swami Dayanada and at his instance came to India in 1879 to Bombay. They started the journal *Theosophist* a monthly and spread the principles of Theosophy. In 1882 they founded the world Headquarters of the Society at Adayar in Madras. Harmony with all religions is the basic principle of their movement. This movement had enjoyed the support of very eminent personalities like Furdunji and Tilang of Bombay Association, N.B. Namjoshi of Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, B. Malabari of *The Indian Spectator of Bombay*, S.K. Ghosh editor of *Amrita Bazaar Patrika of Calcutta*, Narendranath Sen of *Indian Mirror*, Calcutta, A.P. Sinnet of the *Pioneer* of Allahabad, Alan Octavian Hume, Raghunatha Rao and Madhava Rao of Madras. Bala Gangadhar Tilak had written in *Kesari* in 1903 that because of the activities of the Theosophical Society, those who were sceptical about Hinduism and also its antagonists, had reversed their opinion and looked back with understanding. Long before Madam Annie Besant came into the picture many theosophists of India had evinced keen interest in national politics.

In 1884 when the annual convention was held in December last week, seventeen Theosophists met in the house of Raghunatha Rao at Mylapore-Madras and resolved to form and conduct an All India level conference. The seventeen persons who got such a momentous decision were from different parts of India reflecting a national character as if by design. They were S. Subrahmanya

Iyer, P. Rungiah Naidu and P. Anantacharlu from Madras apart from the host Raghunatha Rao; Babu Narendranath Sen. M. Ghosh and Babu Surendranath Banerji from Calcutta; K.T. Tilang, V.N.Mandelek and Dadabhai Naoroji from Bombay; Panduranga Gopal and Pandit Lakshmi Narain from North West Provinces; Sardar Dayal Singh from Punjab; Lala Harishchandra from Benaras; Charu Chandra Mitra from Allahabad and Lala Shri Ram from Oudh. That these seventeen formed the originators of the later National Congress is mentioned in a Tamil Book *India and Self-rule* in 1919. The reference in that book is: "These seventeen were the founders of the (National) Congress which is being highly respected and spoken to with regard from the kind Emperor down to the lower-level field official. Hence they deserve our esteem and praise." Annie Besant in her book *How India wrought freedom* had mentioned about these seventeen persons as the promulgators and originators of National Congress. These seventeen decided to have the first ever congregation. The meeting to take such decisions took place after the annual convention of the Theosophists in December 1884. Bipin Chandra Pal in his book *Memoirs of my life* had this to write: "The success of the annual convention of the Theosophical Society in the year 1884 was to provoke the idea of convening a Conference in the minds of like-minded members of the Society."

The fact is that just like any other cultural organisation that caused the urge in the minds of right-thinking persons to express their political opinions and implement them in an organised manner, the Theosophical Society too had its share of national urge imbibed in the minds of their members. However, when the National Congress was formed the very idea to hold it in December that too in the last week is not by accident or due to any incidental coincidence, but the influence of the Theosophical Society's Annual conventions being held regularly in the last few days of a Calendar Year availing the Christmas Holidays (i.e., last week in December of every year.)

When Annie Besant brought in the 'Home Rule' movement, that too enjoyed a good reception and popularity only due to the popularity of Theosophical Society to a very large extent.

5. Ramakrishna Mission

This mission was started by Swami Vivekananda in 1897. The

literature published by this mission does not contain any political reference directly or indirectly and concerns only with matters—spiritual, ethical and moral. Yet it is a fact that many stalwarts in the national and political field got influence and encouragement not only from Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, but also from other Sanyasins of the Mission or Math.

The speech of Swami Vivekananda at Chicago in the parliament of Religions on 11 September 1893, not only brought out the uniqueness of Hinduism but also raised the national prestige. This fact was recollected in the English monthly journal *Bala Bharata* of November 1907 issue for which Subrahmanya Bharati was the Editor—“that day Hinduism was defined once again and that very day the seeds of Indian Nationalism were sown.”

Spiritualism is the bed-rock of social life and harmony in society. The awareness of spiritualism as it develops, induces the national spirit as well as political consciousness. Swami Vivekananda notes in his article—“Historical Evolution of India”. “We have seen throughout the History of India, a spiritual upheaval is almost always succeeded by a political unity extending over more or less the entire area of the continent which in its form helps to strengthen the spiritual aspiration that brings it to being.” Generally while Nationalism and Patriotism emerged throughout the world, they did not touch the common man and India was no exception to it. But Swami Vivekananda was the first person to point out this lacuna in the national approach to social consciousness and indicated that the involvement and participation of common man alone will form the basis of national life. The greater blunder committed by our people is that of isolating the illiterate common man from the main stream. He preferred to name it (the lacuna) as the “National great Sin.”

He wrote a letter from America to his ardent disciple Mandayam Alagiasinga Perumal of Madras on 23 March 1896 wherein he said: “The only hope of India is from the masses. The upper classes are physically and morally dead”. Vivekananda always felt that a strong and vibrant India must arise from “the cottages of the peasants grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobblers and the sweepers.”

Though a saint and a philosopher, Swami Vivekananda had

noticed the weaknesses in the Hindu Society down the ages and wanted to create a rejuvenated and regenerated India through the path of Vedanta which he termed as "Practical Vedanta". In one of his addresses at U.S.A. in August 1893 he spoke with emotion: "We in India are suffering from the vengeance of God, look upon these things—they ground down those people for their own wealth, they heard not the voice of the distressed, they ate from gold and silver when the people cried for bread.... India has been conquered again and again for years and last and worst of all came the Englishmen. God has had no mercy upon my people because they had no mercy. By their cruelty they degraded the populace and when they needed them the common people had no strength to give for their aid. If man cannot believe in the vengeance of God, he certainly cannot deny the vengeance of history. The English have their heels on our necks and sucked the last drop of our blood for their own pleasures, They have carried away with them millions of our money, while our people have starved by villages and provinces."

Resenting the repressive measures by the British Administration, the Swami wrote to his American Disciple Mary Hale in October 1899: "For writing a few words of innocent criticism men are being hurried to transportation for life, others imprisoned without any trial and nobody knows when his head will be off."

The Swamiji expressed openly as advice to the National Congress that they must take it as their first duty to impress upon all residents of India to have an articulate feeling that they are all "Indians" first. This basic attitude of the Swamiji is revealed in the interview he gave to a reporter of *India-London Paper* in 1896 at London.

6. *Wahabi Movement*

Janab Abdul Wahab of Arabia started a movement called "Back to the days of Holy Quoran". In India Syed Ahmed in Rai Bareili started a similar movement. It was mainly against the Sikhs' domination in Punjab and British domination in Bengal. However, the movement was repressed with strong measures.

In 1804, Moulvi Shariatullah started a movement in Bengal called Faridia Movement which had its objectives in the

reformation of Muslim Community and agricultural revolution. It was also suppressed in 1857.

7. *The Ahamadia Movement*

The Ahamadia movement had its objective not to be radical in the implementation of its goals. It concerned only with the social reforms like enlightening the fellow Muslims to understand the futility of barren traditions and practices which had no meaning, to point out the lapses in the practice of religion and to oppose the Christian movement from percolating into the system. The founder architect of this was Mirza Gulam Ahmed (1839-1908). Because of its non-radical approach, it could not click well and in fact in 1974 the Pakistan Parliament passed a resolution that Ahamadias are not Muslims.

8. *Aligarh Movement*

In order to remove the gap that emerged between the British administration on one side and Muslims on the other hand as an aftermath of 1857 revolution, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) opened many schools to enable Muslim students to study and to expose themselves to the new education system from that of the traditional Madararas. In 1857, he found the Anglo-Muslim Oriental College which later became the Aligarh Muslim University. This action of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan provided opportunities for the Muslims to ponder over their problems and to obtain a new regeneration of thought. This movement came to be known as "Aligarh Movement". Through '*Tahazib-ul-Akshak*' (Social Reformist) Sir Syed brought out new interpretations to the Holy Quoran and gained authorities for his actions. He urged the Muslims to give up mediaeval ways of life and thought; advocated the uplift of women's status in the society; urged for the removal of *purdah* and the spread of education to all irrespective of sex in their community. However, towards the end of his life, Sir Syed had a different outlook in political sphere and talked about Hindu domination in the Nationalist Movement preventing the Muslims from having their contribution to the full. But he was careful not to offend the British rulers.

9. *Darul-Uloom of Deoband*

This Islamic religious school was started in 1867 in Deoband in Uttar Pradesh. Moulana Kanodali and his close friend Moulana

Rashid Ahmed Gangoly opposed the Britishers in 1857 revolution along with Hindus. They nourished Darul-Uloom to a considerable extent. The school stood against that of preachings of Sir Syed Ahmed. Though it was very conservative in the religious practices, in the political field it was very progressive. This school did not approve of 'Jehad'—the holy war. It issued 'Fatwas' to its members for co-operating with the Hindus in the matters of wordly affairs which did not conflict with the Muslim tenets. It opposed the British rule severely. It countered the anti-congress activities and propaganda of Sir Syed Ahmed and condemned the claim of separation of region for the Muslim people.

The British administration had seen through the different and discordant notes amongst all the institutions of both Muslims and Hindus and successfully played their pet game "Divide and rule" to their end.

Provincial Political Organisations

Long before the Indian National Congress started in 1885 as an All India organisation, a few provincial institutions nurtured political ideas and ideologies.

The credit must naturally go to Bengal for such innovative steps. Having been exposed to the English language, culture and customs for a longer period than any one in other parts of India, Bengal served as a window to peep through the Western world. In Calcutta in 1837 a society called "Land Holders Society" was formed. Thereafter many associations came up to ascertain the rights and claims of natives. In 1839 the "British India Society", in 1857 "The British Indian Association", in 1875 "Indian League," and in 1876 "Indian Association" sprang up one after another. Many a stalwart like Dwarakanath Tagore, Devendranath Tagore, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Umeshchandra Banerji, Sambhuchandra Mukherji, Romesh Chandra Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Surendra Nath Banerji and others took active parts in them. *The Hindu Patriot*, *Indian Mirror* and the *Bangalee*, the famous papers of the day contributed their share of encouragement for these institutions to flourish in Bengal. Surendranath Banerji was a live wire among the various personalities who struggled for the spreading of

Nationalism and Patriotism in Bengal. When he visited the Delhi Durbar in 1877 he found people from various regions of India congregating there for the function. An idea struck him at that time to arrange for a similar congregation to enable all parts of India to become aware of the ideas of Bengal Nationalists. An announcement was made in 1882 and the first National Conference took place at Calcutta from December 28 to 30, 1883 for three days. The second such conference was announced to be held on 28 December 1885 and exactly at the same time Hume also convened the First Conference of National Congress at Bombay. In spite of this a large number of representatives attended the Calcutta Conference from various parts of India. As such credit must be given to Surendranath Banerji for formulating the idea of Annual Conference in the political field even though the Theosophists' Annual Convention too takes place in the last week of December every year, perhaps synchronising with Christmas Holidays.

In Bombay an association under the name of "Bombay Association" was started on 26 August 1852. This had the financial support of the Parsis. Nowroji Furdunji, Dadabhai Naoroji, Maha Deo Govind Ranade, Ferozshah Mehta and Kashinath Triyambak Tilang strived much for the development of the Association.

At Poona, the Poona-Deccan Association and Poona Association were the two institutions which re-emerged as "Poona Sarvajanic Sabha" a prominent institution in 1870. This Sabha had the unique privilege of having the personal attention and care of Maha Deo Govind Ranade in its development from 1871. From 1878 this Sabha brought out an organ by name *Journal of Poona Sarvajanic Sabha* a quarterly in which Ranade was contributing systematically articles of political, social and literary nature. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the disciple of Ranade was the Editor of this journal for a long time. The most popular Mahratta leader S.H. Chiplunkar was the Secretary of the Sabha.

Among the various regional institutions that insisted on the need for an Indian Political system on All India basis, Poona Sarvajanic Sabha was one. On 16 November 1884, the architect of National Congress—Alan Octavian Hume, had written a letter to the "Sarvajanic Sabha" in which he stressed the need for an All

India Political set-up. In 1885, it was decided to inaugurate the National Congress and the Sarvajanik Sabha undertook the responsibility to play host but due to the outbreak of plague, the venue was shifted to Bombay from Poona.

Political Organisations in Madras Presidency

On 11 December 1851, Devendranath Tagore, on behalf of British Indian Association of Calcutta, wrote a letter to Gazulu Lakshmi Narasu Chetty who was a leading personality in the Hindu community and took active interest in educating the people and creating public opinion for the first time in Madras, in which he requested him to form an Association like the British Indian Association—a public forum through which public opinion could be collected and sent to the Crown on a unified basis. In the letter it was mentioned: “It must be obvious to you that the representation would have great weight if they were made simultaneously by the natives of every part of British India or by a Society having just pretensions to represent them. There are however, advantages likely to follow from the Union of native gentlemen of the other three presidencies with the British Indian Association, which should not be overlooked.”

As a result of this, on 26 February 1852, under the Presidency of P. Appasami Pillai, a meeting was held in which a branch of the Calcutta British Indian Association was formed. C. Yegambaram Mudaliar became President of the Madras Branch with V. Ramanujachari as Secretary. Gazulu Chetty became Patron. The Magazine ‘*Crescent*’ which Gazulu Chetti started in 1844, helped much to stabilize the newly formed Branch. Within a short period the Branch became an Independent body with a new name “Madras Native Association.” In fact in later years when the Madras Mahajana Sabha and the Congress network Associations were started, many of the founder-members of the new set-ups had already gained good experience in the Madras Native Association. A few celebrities who took active interest in the Native Association were—Sir T. Madhava Rao, Raghunatha Rao, T. Muthuswamy Iyer, M. Veeraraghavachariar, P. Anantacharlu, Balaji Rao, Salem Ramaswamy Mudaliar and P. Rungiah Naidu.

On 16 May 1884, in *The Hindu* Office at Madras a few elite of

Madras city met and founded the Mahajana Sabha. The prime movers for the formation were—G. Subrahmanya Iyer, M. Veeraraghavachari, P. Anantacharlu, P. Rungiah Naidu, Balaji Rao, and Salem Ramaswami Mudaliar. At that meeting P. Rungiah Naidu was elected President and the Secretaries were M. Veeraraghavachari and P. Anantacharlu. P. Balaji Rao became the Vice-President. The much honoured public figure P. Rungiah Naidu was its President consecutively for 18 years. '*The Hindu*' which was being published thrice a week then, and the weekly *Swadesamitran* did much to nourish and sustain the Mahajana Sabha. This Sabha in Madras functioned a bit ahead as compared to its counterparts in other provinces. Generally these institutions prepared and presented petitions to the British Parliament regarding their political and civic needs, sent deputations to present grievances in person, formulate public opinion in their regions, issue of pamphlets regarding important matter and such other similar functions. But the Madras Sabha had a premium over public opinion and hence showed much concern and interest in obtaining representations from public and fostering public relationship a function which got the Sabha a mass contact and mass basis.

In 1885, when National Congress was formed, it sought the co-operation of the Madras Mahajana Sabha. A prior intimation and request in that regard were sent to the organisers of the Sabha. S. Subrahmanya Iyer, G. Subrahmanya Iyer, P. Rungiah Naidu, P. Anantacharlu, M. Veeraraghavachari, and S.V. Antulay were elected to represent the Mahajana Sabha at the National Congress Conference at Bombay on 12 December 1885.

An Advertisement in the *Swadesamitran* of 2 June 1893, conveys the idea that the Mahajana Sabha at Madras was the standing Committee of the National Congress at Madras. Subrahmanya Bharathi, the first and greatest of National poets, wrote in *India*—a political weekly of 27 March 1906 that Mahajana Sabha formed "the focal point for the whole of Madras Presidency" and hence no wonder that the Congress organisation sought its assistance and co-operation. The Mahajana Sabha celebrated its centenary four years ago under the Presidentship of then Vice-President of India. It is still going strong with its activities.

The Birth of the National Congress

Discerning persons will notice that the atmosphere in which the Indian National Congress was formed was different from those of similar institutions at other places. The cultural movements at various regions and the provincial political organisations form the background for the birth of the idea of the National Congress. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) preferred to term the instance as not the birth of an organisation but the blossoming or manifestation of an institutional spirit.

The Congress organisation was first formed with 72 graduates. More or less it became a forum for the English-educated gentlemen. The chief demand that was presented on their behalf was that there must be opportunities open to the English-educated Indian members in the Government and administration. The British administration too very judiciously saw to it that these persons were kept separated from the Indian mass so that they might not indulge in revolts if ever there were public agitations. Thus a caste as "English educated and government employed" was further created amidst the innumerable castes with which India was infested.

In 1883, the then Viceroy wrote to Lord Kimberly that the new reality in the sub-continent must be realised and accepted as a fact. He said, "It is better to acknowledge the new class as a political reality in British Indian Society and ascertain its grievances, to trust its leaders and encourage them and by timely foresight, take steps to supply the legitimate outlets for those aspirations and satisfy those ambitions consistent with the maintenance of authority."

It was mentioned in the early conferences of the National Congress that the Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon (1880-84) gave an impetus to the awakening of National consciousness. That Lord Ripon was considerate to Indians was evidenced in the farewell given to him at Bombay at 1884 with representatives from all parts of India. The next Viceroy Lord Dufferin too (1884-88) encouraged the formation of an All India Political Organisation amongst the English educated. At this juncture Alan Octavian Hume (1829-1912) who enjoyed the confidence and goodwill amongst the office bearers of provincial political committees, journalists, and public men apart from Viceroys Lord Ripon and

Lord Duffrin, offered to help form an organisation of all India level. He sent round a circular on 1 March 1883 to all the graduates of Calcutta University urging that educated Indians must come forward to start such an association. In 1884, the news regarding the farewell to Lord Ripon was published in all leading newspapers of India. *The Hindu* in its 26 December 1884 issue put up a forceful plea for the formation of an All India set-up. "The simplest way of securing such expression will be to affiliate the numerous local associations that are scattered all over the country with a common mother association so as to speak consisting of persons representing different parts of the country." Subsequently A.O. Hume held a discussion with the editor of *The Hindu*—G. Subrahmanya Iyer. After that Hume wrote a personal letter to Lord Ripon at London that he would soon convene a convention of delegates from different parts of India. An announcement appeared in *The Hindu* on 5 December 1885 just three weeks before the scheduled meeting date, regarding the convention being held at Poona. But it took place at Bombay due to exigencies of time.

With the co-operation of provincial Political set-ups, Hume succeeded to form an All India Conference (Congress) at Bombay and he placed three objectives as important for the new organisation.

1. The fusion into one national whole of all the different and till recently discordant elements that constitute the populations of India.
2. The gradual regeneration along all lines—mental, moral, social and political—of the nation thus evolved—and
3. The consolidation of the Union between England and India by securing the modification of such of its conditions as may be unjust or injurious to the later country.

For 20 years consecutively serving the organisation as Secretary, Hume passed away in his eighty fourth-year in 1912.

From 1886 to 1914—for a period of 28 years—the National Congress organisation expressedly showed its loyalty and respect to the Crown through their attitudes. This kind of moderate action had to face a stiff opposition under the Presidency of Bala Gangadhar Tilak when he proffered a radical policy for adoption.

Moderate Policy: The name “moderate policy” was given by the historians of National Congress. It is not a declared policy of the Congress itself. In 1896 Maha Deo Govinda Ranade had in a press release clarified their stand: “our stand is clear that we will be loyal as per the law and also demand our participation in the governance of the country as far as the legal procedures allow us to enjoy and claim equal opportunities for all the people. We neither ask for impossible nor fix our targets at a distant ideal. With friendly approach and in a peaceful way, to march ahead step by step in our goal of National freedom”. This kind of policy had been termed as “moderate policy” by historians. Though the adherents of this policy were conservative and slow in matters political yet in social affairs were radical and intolerant and wanted progressive measures to be adopted in social reforms. They brought out very valuable works regarding Economic Nationalism. To explain the drain of the Indian wealth to Britain, Dadabhai Nowroji in 1871 formulated the “Drain Theory” in his book *Poverty and the unBritish rule in India*. Similarly Romesh Chandra Dutt brought out *The Economic History of India under early British rule*. G. Subrahmanya Iyer’s book *Some Economic Aspects of the British Rule in India* and *Prosperous India* by William Digby are also to be noted in this context.

Ferozsha Mehta was the unrivalled monarch of moderate policy and he kept up that condition till his death. Gopala Krishna Gokhale, Dadabhai Naoroji, Ranade, Surendranath Banerji and others were the prominent leaders who practised this moderate policy.

The radicals (extremists) believed much in the mass movement and never believed the change of mind in the Britishers to hand over freedom to the people of India. Hence their policy was to oppose the British supremacy and to arrange struggles against the administration.

In 1907 at the Surat Conference of the National Congress, the confrontation took place between moderates and extremists. The opposition had the opportunity gifted by the administration by dividing the Bengal Province in 1905. Hence Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education and Swaraj became the slogans of the extremists to inspire the masses for participating in the struggles.

Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo

Ghosh in Bengal, Balagangadhar Tilak in Maharashtra, Subrahmanya Bharati, Subrahmanya Siva and V.O. Chidambaram Pillai in Tamil Nadu were the rallying point of radicalism from whom the sparks of extremism glowed out in triumph.

Mahakavi Subrahmanya Bharati was the only radical poet wafting the aroma of revolution in the achievement of Swaraj and Subrahmanya Siva was a fiery orator from whose mouth incandescent words emerged, which made the audience highly emotional and restless. Chidambaram Pillai was a systematic organiser utilizing the help of both the nationalists to the maximum advantage for inculcating patriotism and nationalism in the minds of the people of his region.

But Chidambaram's entry into politics was at a stage when extremism was not in its full swing and moderation was reigning supreme. Thus the emergence of the national demand for freedom and the struggle for the same with the full co-operation and participation of the masses was steady and strong with the background of cultural and spiritual organisations which alone sustained the tenor of the struggle.

II

The Emergence of the Hero

PANCHALAM KURUCHI IS in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. It was once ruled by Katta Bomman who questioned the need for paying tribute to the British Administration. Perhaps historically he was the first person to oppose the British rule from Tamil Nadu. Popular opinion is that the rebel was born in Ottappidaram village not far away from Panchalam Kuruchi. Eight miles away from that village is Ettayapuram wherein the first National poet Mahakavi Subrahmanya Bharati was born, who became Chidambaram's inspirer and admirer in later period. Olaganatham Pillai, father of Chidambaram, was related to Lieutenant Thanapathi Pillai who served Katta Bomman as minister.

In that firmament of alien antagonism and staunch patriotism, in the same village Ottappidaram Chidambaram was born on 5 September 1872. His parents were Olaganatham Pillai and Paramayi Ammal. Chidambaram had five younger brothers and two sisters.

Following the practice in the village, young Chidambaram had his early education in the village itself. His teacher Veerapperumal Annavi taught him a lot of Tamil works that were usually taught at the primary level which incidentally inculcated in the young minds a sense of morality and righteousness that stood in good stead in their later lives.¹ Along with the study of Tamil works, English was also taught to him through private tuition. When the tutor left the village, Olaganatham Pillai constructed a school in that village wherein provision for the teaching of English was made. Thus an arrangement meant for the boy Chidambaram

1. In the villages in ancient days the traditional pattern of education was to teach to youngsters the following text-books which were considered primary and also expected to inculcate the good path in life of the learner. The list of Tamil Works—Arichuvadi, Athichudi, Ennin Suvadi (Arithmetic), Ulaganithi, Konrai Vendan, Kuzhiyin churukkam (Mathematics), Vetri Verkai and Venba Muthurai.

became a gift to the whole village for all the boys to be introduced to the study of English. In his thirteenth year Chidambaram migrated to Tuticorin to continue his studies. He passed the matriculation examination through the Caldwell High School. Noteworthy feature during that period was that Chidambaram got good English foundation from Annathurai Iyer and Kasturi Iyengar and Tamil from Savuriraya Pillai. Soon after this, young Chidambaram joined local Taluk Office as a clerk. With a liking for lawyer's profession, he studied law under the legal luminaries at Trichy—Ganapati Ayyar and Harihara Ayyar. Chidambaram's grand father's paternal uncle and father were lawyers and hence legal acumen, it appears, was in his blood itself. Practising at the local Sub-Magistrate's Court, Chidambaram made mark in the criminal side rather than in the Civil side even though he practised both. However, he was a stickler for good conduct, truth and public welfare consistent with professional ethics. When the police foisted cases on innocent and illiterate people he took their brief without even any fees and thus incurred the wrath of the police. He was even implicated in a murder case lest he should appear for the accused. He even exposed the corrupt officials and brought punishment for them.

Finding his son was alienating the officials, father Olaganatham Pillai advised him to go to Tuticorin and continue the practice there. Accordingly Chidambaram moved to Tuticorin in August 1900 and it became a turning point in his career.

Chidambaram got married in his twenty-third year i.e., in 1895 to Valliammai of Tiruchendur. She was an apt match in all respects to Chidambaram, who stood by her husband in all his social and literary activities.

Once Chidambaram brought home one Ramayya Desigar of Virudhunagar. He belonged to a downtrodden community. He was blind but a man of wide learning and expansive wisdom. Valliammai took a special interest in attending to him. Even when Chidambaram was worried about the calumny spread by his relatives because of low born guest, the wife consoled Mr. Pillai saying "How can there be a caste and community for a sanyasi? God is present in all; let us not bother about others' opinions" That Valliammai was not for short-cut means to gain clients for her husband is evident in the instance when a relative of Mr. Pillai

expected commission for getting a client to him, she stoutly and unequivocally advised her husband to decline the brief as such methods were not decent and straight forward. In fact Chidambaram's admiration to her was such that on her passing away after a period of six years of married life, (1901) he was terribly shaken and took much time to overcome it. He wrote an elegy on her under the title "Story of Valliammai"² in Tamil in venba metre and got it published in 1915. Perhaps it brought him solace. Later he married Meenakshi Ammai—a distant relative of his first wife. She too was an understanding house wife and was a staunch supporter in his home for all his activities—To this couple four sons and four daughters were born. Chidambaram brought home Sahajananda Swami—a sanyasi from the Harijan community. His wife without any remonstrance hosted the guest to the satisfaction of all. Chidambaram treated the Swamiji as a member of his family and made him participate in all the household celebrations and household functions. Sahajananda Swami used to say to all that Chidambaram was treating him as his own son. It will be pertinent to note in this context that Swami Sahajananda was an ardent Advaitin and worked throughout his lifetime for the uplift of Harijans. He impressed upon them (the Harijans) the need for education and to facilitate the spread of the same opened up hostels for the students to stay and study and caused construction of schools with government aid.

Being born in a family of staunch Saivaite faith and Tamil traditions, Chidambaram had inherited those traits in full measure and developed the same though proper instructions received from stalwarts in that field. His zeal in Tamil was even considered a fault in arguing his cases in the court. But his fondness towards Tamil had its own fruits. Subramaniya Siva an ardent votary of Tamil became a close friend to him and the two later participated in many a revolutionary actions which compelled the Government to put them in jail. During the Nationalist Movement, the contribution of the three redoubtable leaders viz., Chidambaram, Subrahmanya Siva and Subrahmanya Bharati was indeed matchless and immense.

2. Mr. Pillai got Valliammaicharithram published in 1915 through Mr. Muthuswamy Pillai, his wife's brother. The work contains 215 verses of Venba metre and is the verbal testimony to the exemplary life which Valliammai lived as wife to Mr. Pillai.

In 1905 the Madurai Tamil Sangam honoured Chidambaram by making him an Honorary Member. Pandi Thurai Thevar who revived the Madurai Tamil Sangam wrote to Chidambaram on 12 May 1905 that by accepting to be a member, Chidambaram had done good to the Sangam in the development and expansion of activities of Sangam.

How well he deserved the honour will be known by perusing the Chapter on “Chidambaram’s literary contributions.” The struggle for independence had stirred the nation’s conscience and aroused the spirit of nationalism in the People. But it did not end there. It reflected on the need to recognise the influence and importance of one’s mother tongue also. Chidambaram’s love towards Tamil and patriotism was in equal measure.

Being an honest and sincere religionist, Chidambaram evinced keen interest in the Vedantic studies. As a Saivite, he studiously learnt the two important works in Saivism in Tamil—*Kaivalyam* and *Vichara-Sagaram*. The first book is a Sanskrit work rendered into Tamil by Thandavarya Swamigal. The other one is a work in Hindi by Niscala Dasa, translated into Tamil and published in 1873. Swami Vallinayagam helped Chidambaram learn thoroughly well these two works.

It may be interesting to note that at one time, young Chidambaram even wanted to become a Sanyasin and hence with a shaven head, wearing a loin-cloth and a small pitcher in hand, he started towards Benaras. Hearing about this from a friend at Madurai, father Olaganatham went to Madurai and brought the son back. With an insatiable appetite for knowledge, Chidambaram studied *Gnana Vasishtam*—a highly philosophical work under the Head of the Madurai Brahmananda Swamigal Math—Srijit Somasundara Swamigal. Even at the young age, Chidambaram used to give lectures for propagating Saiva Siddhanta under the auspices of Divine Association at Tuticorin. Besides he organised a Saiva Siddhanta Association with the help of Sivagurunatha Pillai at Tirugnanasambandhar Math at Tuticorin and conducted classes regularly on *Kaivalyanavanitham*. The Saiva classic was very popular once with all sections of Saivism and in fact a cementing force amidst them. The late T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai wrote in his work *Advaitain in Tamil* about Kaivalayam—“There are a number of Kaivalyanavanitha

sangams in the southern districts. They were a great force in nineteenth century. The leaders were often widows. Thanks to the popular advaita of Kaivalyanavanitham, they realised their human worth—and became a living force in the family.... Thus this work became a great social force.”

Swami Vivekananda's preaching of practical Vedanta brought a resurgence amongst youngsters. It will be pertinent to recollect that Subrahmanya Siva, Subrahmanya Bharati and Chidambaram all the three bore adherence to Vedanta and in fact Chidambaram, was even referred to in one of his biographies (1908) as a “camp follower of Vivekananda.”

There are a number of commentaries traditionally taught for Sivagnanabodham but Chidambaram wrote a commentary which would reflect the demands of the contemporary time. In the introduction to his commentary published in 1935 the author wrote: “At this juncture of the time our country is rife with divisions, dissensions and interparty rivalries. Those who stress upon the differences in thought, ideas and practices of religion, caste and other traditional aspects are doing more harm to the country than to themselves, about the rival systems in the fact of Saiva Siddhanta.”³

This introduction had fully reflected the idea of Chidambaram. He desired all people to muster together under one banner for the nation's cause sinking the differences if at all existed. At the same time he wanted people to foster the religious fervour too individually since that alone could give self-confidence and good direction in times of exasperating and intriguing situations. His critical acumen made him feel, after analysing *Sivagnanabodham*, that Vedanta and Siddhanta are one and the same just like two sides of a coin.

3. Introduction to the commentary for *Sivagnanabodham*. In the traditional method, it was customary to denounce the opposition's view, i.e., other systems of Thought and establish one's own school of Thought. This is known as—*Parapaksha Khandana and Svamata Sthapana*. Consistent with that maxim all commentaries uniformly denounced other schools of thought and religions in comparison to Saiva Siddhanta. Mr. Pillai did not agree with that view point. Perhaps his idea was that Religion also being an activity of a human being should not be opposed to other activities of men where in co-operation and absence of division and opposition were expected.

Chidambaram met Swami Ramakrishnananda—the Chief of Ramakrishna Mission at Madras along with his aunt in 1906. This meeting had effected a change in his life's goal. What the pious saivaite Chidambaram got from the spiritual head of a popular and internationally respected Math was not spiritual communion but an arousal of political consciousness. No doubt Truth is stranger than fiction and it became true in the case of Chidambaram and made him a national hero from the far-off South.

Unlike other men of Public life, the history of Chidambaram Pillai upto his first forty years of life is available in our hero's autobiography⁴ in a poetical composition in Tamil. Apart from that "A sketch of the life of V.O.C. Pillai" in Tamil in 48 pages is also available.⁵

Chidambaram Pillai became a legendary figure or a great hero deserving to be worshipped even in his life time.

Whether he deserved that status and public encomium can be found in the subsequent Chapters. But unfortunately public memory is notoriously short and if Chidambaram had been relegated to the background in the on-rush of political expediency and demands of time, people must not be condemned but are to be pitied for not knowing the real worth of patriotism and self-sacrifice for the cause of the nation. That is a curse on the humanity itself and Indian people cannot prove to be exceptions.

4. His autobiography contains details from his birth to the year 1912. The work is in a poetical form. This he wrote during his imprisonment and after his release. But the work was published only after his demise, in 1946.

5. This brief work is in 48 pages with the title *Sriman V.O. Chidambaram Pillai in Jiviya Caritra Churukkam*.

The author's name is not known but the Editor was *S. Vedamurthi Mudaliyar*—Editor of the Tamil Magazine *Sarvajanamitran* and a friend of Mr. Pillai.

III

On to the Political Glare

IT MUST BE noted that Chidambaram's meeting with the Ramakrishna Math Chief—Swami Ramakrishnananda at Madras in 1906 resulted only as a turning point in his political career and not the beginning of his association with politics itself. The tepid interest he had, became a forging fire and developed into militant nationalism in his later days. That he was interested in the National Congress and had taken a keen and active interest in organising the fourteenth annual session at Madras, was evident from a report in the Tamil Journal *Swadesamitran* of 15 August 1898. In fact he records his affiliation in the national politics in his work *Reminiscences of Lokamanya Bala Gangadhar Tilak*: "Lokamanya Bala Gangadhar Tilak is my political guru. From my twenty-first year, i.e., from 1893, I was closely following his writings and speeches on politics. They made me feel that India was my country, that the British were wrongfully retaining it and that it must be got back from them". The speeches of Tilak that were reported in papers and his writings on political themes inspired Chidambaram to have a nibbling at the politics.

It was a period when there was a schism among the members of the National Congress regarding the approach to attain the goal and both the parties defined their stand but the cleavage had not taken a sharper edge. The ideologies, the later historians branded as "Moderates" and "Extremists".

Reverting back to Chidambaram's participation in the National Congress the *Swadesamitran* of 15 August 1898 reported: "The great movement for freedom i.e., the National Congress is to meet at Madras in December and arrangements must be made to make that event a successful one. In that connection a meeting was held at Ottappidaram on 10 August 1898 on Wednesday at 6 p.m., with a large attendance of leading

personalities and Mirasdars of local as well as neighbouring villages. At the time, Palaniandi Mudaliyar, Panduranga Rayor, Rajagopala Iyyar, Thirumalai Sastri, Chidambaram Pillai and others impressed upon the audience the need for a national organisation like National Congress, its annual session at Madras—the special occasion being that the annual meeting was for the fourth time at Madras within fourteen years of its existence—the benefit that may accrue in the long run and hence the need to gather physical support through more members joining and fiscal support to maintain the activities. A Subcommittee was formed on the suggestions of Vakil Chidambaram for which Panduranga Rayor was the President and Chidambaram became its Secretary and Treasurer.

This report alone is the earliest evidence for Chidambaram's connection with active politics and that too through National Congress. He took a keen interest in the education and propagation of Congress' policies and objectives being embedded in the minds of all people—educated or not. In fact his active work in that direction very nearly made his native village Ottappidaram—a nursery for political thought and activities to the neighbouring villages and towns. The peculiarity is that the National Congress took its birth at Bombay, but it had taken deep roots in the extreme south within a span of 13 years through the efforts of Chidambaram. The fourteenth annual session took place at Madras from 29 to 31 December 1898. The President of the session was Ananda Mohan Bose; the reception committee Chairman was the reputed judge N. Subba Rao Pantulu—an Andhra gentleman. Amongst the 614 delegates that attended, 519 were from Tamil Nadu.

In this juncture it will be worthwhile to note the influences that the Swamijis of Ramakrishana Math had cast upon the nationalist leaders including our hero Chidambaram.

Bala Gangadhar Tilak met Swami Vivekananda in 1893 when the latter toured Maharashtra as a Parivrajaka but the meeting was a very formal one and even without knowing him as Vivekananda. But in 1901 when Tilak attended the Calcutta Conference of the Congress, he went to Belur and met the Swami. The meeting was reported as follows: "Swamiji was seen conversing with Tilak while walking on the field south of the Math building. From a distance we only noticed that Swamiji was

talking excitedly with repeated movements of head and hands, while Tilak was calmly listening to him....Swamiji explained to him that a nation could not rise by raising only one portion of it. It cannot advance until the poor and downtrodden masses were uplifted. Tilak's outlook was changed after he came into contact with Swamiji. He started working in various ways for the lower sections of the Society."

At Madras a branch of the Math was opened in 1897 with Swami Ramakrishnananda as its head. He stayed at the "Castle Kernan"—a palatial building in Triplicane nearer the beach which was popularly called 'Ice House' since ice imported from Britain through ships was stocked there for the use of English-men. It was in the same building Swami Vivekananda stayed before he left for Chicago to participate in the Parliament of Religions. The same building is rechristened now as "Vivekananda House" during the Centenary Celebrations of the Hindu Apostle. The owner of the palatial house was Bilagiri Ayyangar, a leading lawyer at that time and also an ardent disciple of Swami Vivekananda. The most vital point here is that he belonged to the family of Mandayam Ayyangars who did a lot during the freedom struggle. From a small room of the house, the branch started its work and continued to remain there till 17 November 1907 when it moved to the present location at Mylapore.

To cite one more instance that Swamijis of Ramakrishna Math had inspired people with national spirit in spite of themselves being plunged in spirituality, that of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose could be taken.

Subhas was very much interested in the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Movement even from his very young age and so he wanted to become a Sanyasi and join the order of the Math. But the then head, Swami Brahmananda counselled him otherwise which turned out to be in good strength for the freedom fight.

The account that Chidambaram offers in his autobiography regarding his meeting with Swami Ramakrishnananda at Madras is very gripping. He went with his aunt to meet the Swamiji at Madras. The Swamiji asked him what steps he had undertaken or intend doing for the cause of fostering and developing the national handiworks and other native traditional crafts. But the reply from Chidambaram was pertaining to philosophy and hinted at the

vanity of the world and its phenomenality on the back drop of Advaitic Vedanta. But the Swamiji's firm reply, a veritable command was—SWADESIYAM. "Nationalism (Swadesiyam) alone will engender many a good fruit and that was my firm conviction", he said. That determined and unambiguous expression made a deep impact on Chidambaram and his career had changed from that time. He records that the advise of the Swamiji was like a good seed sown in a good soil.

Similarly Sister Nivedita of the same Movement had advised the spirit of Nationalism to Subrahmanya Bharati. He himself records in his *Swadesha Gitanjal*: "Just like Lord Krishna showed his Visvarupa to Arjuna and explained to him the truth, similarly Sister Nivedita had described to me the full form of our Mother India—Bharathā Mata and infused into me the force of nationalism—Swadeshi Spirit—and hence she is my Guru."

These instances are cited not without any purpose. The instances reveal the power of spirituality in unravelling the potency of self-rule and self-sacrifice. All the persons cited in fact got not only the advice but also what they call in religious circles—Nayana Diksha. That was the reason why they had the mental strength and the courage of conviction to go ahead with their goals with full readiness to sacrifice all at the altar of their chosen ideals. The pity is all of them suffered a lot of untold and unexpressable miseries for the sake of freedom for the motherland and in that course lost every belonging. Later, it is everyone's knowledge that Mahatma Gandhi insisted on spiritual strength and morality in politics.

Hence, it should be noted with all concern that the awakening of National Spirit in personalities that matter most for the fight for the freedom and obtaining it was not from political ambitions or wishes but emerged from most unexpected quarters which were diagonally opposite to it viz. spiritualism. This fact Subrahmanya Bharati expressed in *India*—a Tamil weekly or precisely the only organ in the South for the cause of Nationalist Party of Tilak—of 30 March 1907: "In order to quell the inequalities and injustices done to us, the Lord has taken His promised Tenth Avatar. Now the advent is not in human form (Kalki Avatar) but the Avatar is in the form of Swadesiyam. The weapon that he wields now is "boycott" i.e. to avoid all alien contacts or in other words

ostracism of alien things whatever it may be. The chief slogan or mantra is “Vande Mataram.”

Swami Ramakrishnananda's Advice

The “Seminal” advice that Chidambaram had from the Swamiji of Ramakrishna Math had a full development continuing the metaphor of seed, he goes on in his memoir as follows: “The advice had the nourishment like watering by the speeches of two Swamijis of the same math within six months who at length dealt with Swadesiyam as Gitopadesa to Arjuna. The germination took place and two leaves sprouted. They are the two institutions: The Tuticorin Labour Welfare Association and the Charities Dharma Society. To protect this tender plant and its leaves, I forged a cage with the sticks of *Vande Mataram: Hail Swadesiyam*, (let the country prosper) etc. the slogans which caught the imagination of all and made all adherents to this theme. With these I hawked the patriotic and Nationalistic spirit into each and every home of my locality. Besides to keep the stray cattle of hypocrites coming anywhere near the plant and destroy the same, I had cautiously kept such people away from these institutions.”

Maiden Article on Politics

Chidambaram wrote articles on politics too. The earliest that is available to us as on date is the one on *Swadesabhimanam* published in *Vivekabhanu*, a monthly journal from Madurai. This literary magazine supported strongly the cause of Nationalism. The first issue was out on first September 1902. From September to next March Ganapathiananda Swamigal was managing the publication and Swami Vallinayagam, a close friend of Chidambaram was its editor. Sometime later Pulavur M.R. Kandaswami Kavirayar, an authority in Tamil, and a zealous Nationalist took charge of the journal. During his tenure, the magazine did yeomen service to Tamil as well as to Nationalism. Chidambaram was contributing a donation of Rs. 12/- every month for the magazine from its inception and also contributed articles from its very first issue, emphasising Bhakti and morality in daily life.

His political article “Swadesabhimanam” appeared in the issue of February 1906. The article was in seven pages and the contents

spread over six sub-titles as—*swadesam* (one's own country), *abhimanam* (attachment), natural quality, time of exposition, method of exposition and the consequential benefit. The aim of the article was to educate the reader about the fundamentals of politics. The salient points of the article were:

1. The time for expressing one's affinity for his native country was when the natives of the land suffer from want of food, clothing and medical facilities and also when the natives lose their freedom and were forced to serfdom or slavery.

2. The land of the birth was like one's mother. If she was responsible for bringing forth a child and hence had to be revered then the land which was responsible for all the present generation as well as their ancestors' sustenance too should be treated more than a mother.

3. The impediments for the natives of this soil from becoming united or to be in unison, were the undue indulgence in caste and religion.

4. If the caste and religious interests were considered small matters and politics and native land as common to all and get united to work for the welfare of the land then freedom would be got easily. For that each and everyone must be ready to sacrifice his all. Wealth, life and every possession for the benefit of the land.

A fervour in the national spirit in the whole of India was keenly felt only on the division of Bengal. The administration thought it fit to divide the large and unwieldy Bengal Province into two for better administration and for the purpose it issued a notification regarding the same. Obviously the natives smelt something fishy and read the policy of "divide and rule" in that action. Hence on 16 October 1906—the day of the partition—was observed throughout the nation as a day of the protest with fasting and prayer. From that time onwards the first two words of the song in the Bengali novel written by Bankim Chandra Chatterji in 1882 became the "mystic chant" of the whole Bharat. The words are "*Vande Mataram*".¹ This expression stood for national unity and integrity.

1. Bankim Chandra Chatterji, a great novelist and revivalist, wrote *Ananda Math* in which a Brahmachari by the name Bhavananda sings the song "Vande Mataram".

Chidambaram had spread this expression so vigorously with a missionary zeal in and out of his native town that he got the popular name “Vande Mataram Pillai”.

Chidambaram's deep involvement in Nationalism could be gauged in the reception he had arranged for Swami Abhedananda at Tuticorin. Swami Abhedananda and Swami Brahmananda were co-disciples along with Swami Vivekananda to Sri Ramakrishna. These two like Swami Vivekananda toured in the western countries and spread the message of spiritualism and Hindu ways of life and religion. Commenting upon the activities of the Swami Vivekananda with special reference to his address in Parliament of Religions at Chicago, *Bala Bharata* in 1908 wrote: “At the Parliament of Religions, that day (when Vivekananda spoke) Hinduism was defined once again; that very day the seeds of Indian Nationalism were sown.”

V.O.C. Meets Swami Abhedananda

When Swami Abhedananda returned from his foreign tour nearly after ten years (from 1896 to 1906) it was at Tuticorin he had to land. The steamer stood at a distance in the sea. Chidambaram went ahead in a launch and received Swami Abhedananda, Swami Ramakrishnananda and Swami Brahmananda—the latter two went to Ceylon to meet Swami Abhedananda. The reception was unique in its nature and reflected the meticulous care and zeal of Chidambaram. He tried to impress the spirit of Nationalism on the onlookers and gave a silent expression to it which was felt by the participants as well.

In *Complete Works of Swami Abhedananda* edited by Swami Pragnananda the function was described thus: “Hearty welcome was now awaiting him at Tuticorin—the Indian port at which he landed on the morning of the twenty-ninth. Mr. Chidambaram with other leading men of the city came out on a steam launch to take the Swamis and their friends ashore. A large crowd were waiting to greet him at the dock and forming into a procession with flags and native music accompanied him with his companions to the residence set apart for them. An interesting feature of this procession was a Swadeshi party wearing a special uniform and shouting at every step Bande Mataram (Hail to the Motherland).”

It was Chidambaram's suggestion to have the uniform for the volunteers. Swami Abhedananda stayed in Tamil Nadu for a month and toured around Tirunelveli, Tenkasi, Madurai, Tiruchirapalli, Srirangam, Pudukkottai, Tanjavur, Kumbakonam, Cuddalore, Madras, Vaniyambadi, Dharmapuri and other places. At all these places the Swamiji was stressing the love of the country besides elucidating the truths our ancients had stored for us.

Despite his religious convictions and literary tastes especially in Tamil classics and religious lores of Saiva Siddhanta, Chidambaram believed in an energetic way of attaining Nationalism and not that of a soft and bargaining nature which the moderate school of Congress professed. The speeches and writings of Tilak had a deeper impress in him, yet they were dormant. Meanwhile, the magazine *India* edited by Subrahmanya Bharati attracted his attention and he used to read it with great interest. When he happened to go to Madras next time, he went to the office of *India* and met its editor. The very first meeting of Bharati and Chidambaram uncovered the latent fervour and made vigorous activity as a necessity for achieving Freedom. He found the significance of the slogan of Tilak "Swaraj is my birth right and I shall obtain it."

The First Meeting with Bharatiyar

In the words of Chidambaram the meeting between Bharatiyar and himself was as follows: "The first meeting made me think that we were closely knit just like the historic King Chola and his Court Poet Kamban. Bharatiyar took me to the beach. Together we sat in the Triplicane Beach for a long time and discussed many things regarding political affairs. I had a feeling then that the glow of a firefly like National spirit in me had grown into that of a leaping flame. That feeling of mine, I conveyed to Bharatiyar. Exactly at that time, the beach lamps were lit. Observing that, charged with emotion, Bharatiyar said—"Mr. Pillai, Mother Goddess shall surely help us. When you are expressing your feelings, the street lamps are lit and it is a good omen and augurs well. I am sure our attempt shall succeed and Mother Goddess shall protect us—Hail to our Goddess Sakti."

This emotion charged speech of Bharati had its full impact on

Chidambaram and made him fully convinced in extremism and became an ardent follower and supporter of Tilak in all his ideas and activities.

Politics—a Secular Matter

But one thing, one must not forget to note in the nature of Chidambaram. The best friends of Chidambaram—Subrahmanya Siva and Subrahmanya Bharati brought in religious ideas particularly Sakti cult of Bengal and identified Bharata Mata as Sakti. This view emerged from Bengal and it coupled itself with Swadeshi Movement. Thus the religious feelings blended harmoniously with political urges, but Chidambaram preferred to be secular. He kept religion as a personal affair and did not relish perhaps the notion of religion-politics combination which happened to be a secular and a non-spiritual affair. Almost all of his public activities were kept at a distance from the religious influences.

His political orations were proverbial. Being a good exponent of religious informations, Chidambaram shone equally well on the political platforms. Starting gradually, he used to increase the tempo with suitable citations from Tamil ancient classics, thus hypnotising his audiences.

S.N. Somayajulu another patriot who had heard Chidambaram make his political oration has this to say: "In his speeches he used to cite literary parallels to carry conviction. His speech if written and read will be a fine prose. Every point will be logically sound and apt. Though he may start with a low and mellifluous tone, gradually his voice will rise and become emotion-packed. It will be a hard-hitting thunderous speech, yet both literate and illiterate would not leave the place till he finished speaking."

In fact the very first imprisonment of Chidambaram along with Subrahmanya Siva was because of their prolific speech treated by the administration as "sedition".

It will be interesting to note the friends of Chidambaram in his early political career. This he himself had given in his autobiography. The list contains the following names—Bala Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, Kharparde—the right hand man of Tilak, Munje; Swamiji of Ramakrishna Math, S.

Srinivasachari of Mandyam Family at Triplicane, who did a lot to spread the message of Tilak in Tamil Nadu and Subrahmanya Bharatiyar.

The greater leap in the extremism in national activities took place in 1906 for Chidambaram Pillai. As a first step of this new chapter he decided to float a swadeshi navigation company and meet the British at the economic front too apart from the political level. In the history of the National Congress this was the first step which Chidamabram took on the path of challenge.

IV

National Movement and Navigational Enterprise

SEA-FARING IS not new to the Tamilians. In fact even two thousand years ago, the Tamils have established their skill and ability in that field by navigating their ships to Rome and even beyond in the West and beyond Sumatra and Java in the East. There are copious references to such adventurous voyages and in certain occasions war too in ancient Sangam classics.

Chidambaram Pillai being an ardent student of Tamil and Tamil Classics began ruminating the idea of sea-faring. A deep study made him feel that in those days trade and commerce flourished and people were free comparing that with the Western sea-farers who came to trade first and then got political supremacy, he firmly believed that he must try to restore not only the good old days and its prosperity but also to put sufficient check to the amassing of wealth by the foreign navigating companies.

Besides, his zeal and fire in the political arena, made him think that such starting of a navigational company will be a formidable economic check to the foreigners who were supported by a foreign administration.

The result was the starting of the “Swadeshi Steam Ship Company”. No doubt that kind of action was not liked by the B.I.S.N. Company which was enjoying a very near monopoly in plying its steamers between Tuticorin and Colombo. Explaining the objectives of the Steam Ship Company, Chidambaram Pillai in one of his lectures said, “This Company is not merely commercial in its motive. These ships will help the British leave the country with their bags and baggages.” Subrahmanya Siva another stormy petrel of the South and a right-hand man of Chidambaram who was sitting next to him interrupted and said: “They cannot take the bags and baggages as the contents in them

were the property fleeced from this soil and hence they have to leave them and go." A glimpse of the political condition and National Movement in Tamil Nadu at that period will provide a good backdrop for such innovative experiments and engagements.

With the partition of Bengal on 16 October 1905, there arose in the political atmosphere a volcanic eruption. Every one opposed the division tooth and nail and saw sinister motives in that action particularly the implementation of the policy of "Divide and rule". But the government affirmed that the division was only for administrative convenience, but none believed. The unity of the land was on the lips of everyone. The phrase "Vande Mataram" became a mystic mantra for mnemonical repetition. This expression was the greeting word when two friends met, a chorus expression in any meeting or congregation and in fact became a symbol for the unity of Indian soil. This kind of emotional resurgence had shaken the British lion too to a certain extent.

In the Calcutta Congress of 1906, the National Congress under the presidency of Dadabhai Naoroji passed a resolution to adhere to the principles of Swaraj, Swadeshiyam, Boycott and National Education. But unfortunately in the Congress itself a difference of opinion in the implementation of such resolutions arose. Some pleaded soft-peddling and a non-antagonistic approach with the government and administration and wanted to have that achieved through negotiations and not with frontal attacks. This policy the historians termed as "moderatism". The other section was aggressive. Bala Gangadhar Tilak said: "The Boycott is a substitute for war. As we cannot go to the war as did the Boars in South Africa, the next best thing is to refuse to buy the British goods. That is the spirit behind the Swadeshi and boycott movement."

In his *Bande Mataram* issue of 21 June 1907 Aurobindo Ghosh wrote that weapon of passive resistance was sometimes more than a match even for sword and bayonet.

Because of these catchy and emotion-stirring slogans, there was an attraction from all quarters of India and from all sections of people. As a sequence, many a leader rose in all parts of the country.

Spread of Swadeshi Movement

In the Tamil Nadu G. Subrahmanya Iyer made whirl-wind tour in all parts and distributed pamphlets to educate the people in the National Movement. In 1906, a Congress Conference was held at Barisal and the administration came heavily upon the meeting and treated the people very badly. A book was published by *Swadesmitran* narrating the atrocities committed by the administration on the people who met under the title *Barisal Atrocities*. Subrahmanya Iyer brought out a cheap edition of the same with the price of four annas i.e. twenty five paise.

In 1921 when Mahatma Gandhi put forth his “non-cooperation movement”, he announced that as one of the principles of the policy that the Indians should renounce the sannadas, awards or any recognitions offered by the British. But G. Subrahmanya Iyer had said the same thing in 1907 itself. As narrated in “Hundred Years of the Hindu—The epic story of Indian Nationalism.” “Subrahmanya Iyer’s transformation was so rapid and radical that even *The Hindu* had to part company with him. When he urged the giving up of titles and honorary offices under the British Government. Subrahmanya Iyer made this suggestion at a district Political Conference in 1907.”

Though the *Swadesmitran* was not as radical in its presentation of news and views as the *India* of Subrahmanya Bharati, yet it enjoyed a very good popularity and commanded a reliable influence amongst the village population. The paper reported regularly the news regarding speeches of Chidambaram Pillai at Tuticorin and other places for spreading the National Movement. This irritated the Government and it charged the Editor G. Subrahmanya Iyer under sedition and he was arrested. However, he was released after the intervention of influential persons, with a furnishing of a personal security bond of Rs. 5,000 and two sureties for Rs. 2,500 each, and to be of good behaviour for one year.

G. Subrahmanya Iyer’s contribution in the National Movement was immense. He formed a trust called “Madras Swadeshi Movement Nidhi and Labour Association.” Mr. Iyer and Hanumantha Rao were the secretaries. The annual subscription was three rupees and any one of 21 years and above could become a member.

Its objectives were :

1. To protect and foster the handiworks of our country which have been in existence traditionally since unknown past.
2. To educate the people in technical and allied subjects through lectures and distribution of hand bills.
3. To depute young men to various parts of India and also to foreign countries for obtaining technical qualifications with financial assistance.
4. To help financially such educated persons who have returned with experience, for starting industries and other labour employment potentialities.
5. To gather full and detailed information regarding all the various varieties of handicrafts and trade for imparting such knowledge to others.
6. To implement such other courses of action, which would improve and enhance the chances for national trade and handicrafts.

Under this scheme one B.A. graduate was sent to Japan, with a scholarship of Rs. 600 a month, with the stipulation that he should learn the skill of manufacturing soap, candle, match box, pencils and cement and start industries in India on his return. In the exhibition held at Conjeevaram and Tiruvannamalai, persons who exhibited their skills in weaving and working on power looms were given cash prizes of Rs. 275 each.

Subrahmanya Bharati who had his training in journalism under G. Subrahmanya Iyer praised his services which were of momentous nature in the *India* issue of 11 August 1906.

In the *Bande Mataram* issue of 23 April 1907, Aurobindo Ghosh wrote, "Boycott foreign goods and boycott those who use foreign goods—the advice of Mr. Subrahmanya Iyer to his countrymen in Madras must be accepted by all who are in earnest." Chidambaram Pillai appealed to the public to donate liberally to this cause. The *jeer* of Vanamalai Math blessed the scheme and donated Rs. 25.

The Swadeshi Movement had many a mode of action. One such act was the founding of *Swadeshi Articles Propaganda Association* (*Swadesi Vastu Pracharini Sabha*) by the youngsters

who admired Bharatiyar and acted as per his advice and command.

A young admirer of Bharatiyar who was also a student of Law College, V. Chakkarai Chettiar, and who later started the labour movement in Tamil Nadu, was the Chairman of the Association. This association held meetings in Public every week at a stipulated locality to propagate the meaning of Swadeshi Movement and its utility. Similarly, there was another organisation by the name *The Bala Bharata Sangham*.

Bharathiyar was the founder father for this too. This association had its branches at mofussil towns also.

In spite of the efforts from all angles by zealous and industrious workers for the spread of Nationalism, it did not click in the minds of the people at Madras as much as the persons expected.

On 8 August 1906 Chidambaram arranged for the First Annual Convention of the National Movement at Tuticorin. For this meeting G. Subrahmanya Iyer was the President. On 29 September 1906, Chidambaram lectured on National Movement under the Presidency of Pandi Thurai Thevar, a family member of the Setupati Kings of Ramnad. At that time he explained the significance of “Vande Mataram” and “Swadeshiyam” in the context of National Movement. The governmental record regarding this meeting runs as—“Chidambaram Pillai described Vande Mataram as—‘I prostrate myself to my Motherland’—and Swadeshi meant—‘the development of Indian Industries by Indians’and contended that there was no harm in the raising of the Vande Mataram slogan by school boys.”

In a public meeting at Madras—South Beach opposite to Ladies Park, Chidambaram Pillai spoke on 17 March 1907 as follows—“Brethren! Man proposes one thing and God disposes the same in a different way. It is likely that good may emerge from the bad. The striking example is the division of Bengal by Lord Curzon to divide the unity of Indian people, but the unity has forged itself double and throughout the country.”

Aurobindo Ghosh prophesied that men like Chidambaram Pillai are to shape the future of India. A note in the book *Political Thoughts of Aurobindo* has this to say: “The future of India is not in the hands of Vakils or the English educated graduates. In their

thought—they were the nation. But there are persons who are prepared to lay down even their lives at a slight movement of the lips of great leaders like Tuticorin Chidambaram Pillai, Bandarpur Tilak and Bengal Bipinchandra Pal. Only in such self-sacrificing persons the future of India rests.”

Bipin Chandra Pal Visits Madras

In May 1907, Bipin Chandra Pal visited Madras and gave six lectures on the Triplicane Beach every day evening from 3 to 8. These lectures brought out a perceptible change in the attitude of the people. Bharathiyar wrote in his *India* on 11 May 1907, that the visit and speeches of Pal had cast a miraculous effect on the otherwise slumbering people of Madras. After the visit in every street and in every place the talk was only about Nationalism and the first utterance was Vande Mataram.

The popularity and influence of Bipin Chandra Pal can be gauged if only we take into account the celebration arranged at far off Tuticorin by Chidambaram Pillai and Subrahmanya Siva on the day of the release of Pal from jail on 9 March 1908 and also the varieties of challenges and threats the two received from various quarters which the latter braved boldly. The Madras Jana Sangh was founded in Triplicane at a meeting held in Gangai Koden Mantap on 11 January 1908.

An acting committee was formed with seven members and S. Srinivasachari B.A., B.L., was its Chairman.

Subrahmanya Bharati in his letter to Tilak dated 29 May 1908 referred to the Jana Sangh in the following words:

“Dear Guruji,

I received a letter from Ganesh Krishna Varma asking us to open a Hindi Class in Madras under the auspices of the Chennai Jana Sangh. We have already opened a small class. I hope it will be fairly well attended. In due course of time I shall report its progress....We have decided to have a National Provincial Conference in Madras on the lines marked out in the Calcutta Congress. What about the next Congress? What has become of the new Nationalist Committee? Our Secretary Mr. Chidambaram is just how you know.”

This Jana Sangh worked as if it were the Madras Branch of the Nationalist Party of Tilak. In a public meeting held under its auspices, the best friend of Bharati—Ethiraj Surendranath Arya was convicted to jail for five years for his speech. After that the organisation became defunct.

Jana Sangh Branch at Tuticorin

But Chidambaram started a branch of this Jana Sangh at Tuticorin and did wonderful work under its auspices. The petty feuds and cases were settled amicably without resorting to the Governmental Courts. It founded schools to impart instructions in handicrafts and organised native financial institutions like Banks. The proforma application to become a member of the Jana Sangh at Tuticorin was “I undersigned do hereby solemnly declare that I will boycott foreign cloth, sugar, enamelled vessels totally and the foreign goods as far as possible and that I will pay Rs. to the Sangh every month and become a member of it.” One can see the national spirit fully encompassing the application form itself which was the main expectation of Chidambaram Pillai. Due to the untiring efforts of Chidambaram Pillai and his band of zealous workers, the objectives were achieved beyond expectation.

It is at this juncture Chidambaram Pillai thought of attacking the British in the Navigational front also. He earned the popular sobriquet—“Ship-floating Tamilian” (Kappalottia Tamizhan).^{*} In fact he was not the first person to float a shipping Company in India.

Early Attempts to Launch Navigation Companies

The Indian natives’ venture to float ships in competition to British vessels in fact started in Bengal. Jyotirindranath Tagore—a scion of the famous Tagore family began in 1884 an “Inland River Steam Navigation Service” and brought five ships to put to

^{*} This title for Chidambaram Pillai was first pronounced by M.P. Sivagnanam popularly known as Ma. Po. Si. He arranged for the first ever celebration for V.O.C. and toiled hard to spread the name and activities of V.O.C. in the recent past. It must be noted here that Ma. Po. Si himself is a grand old man like “Bhisma”, happily living with us, among the freedom fighters of India in the Gandhian era. He has a couple of books on V.O.C.

service. Their names were *Sarojini*, *Bangalakshmi*, *Swadeshi*, *Bharat* and *Lord Ripon*.

We can notice the nationalistic spirit in the nomenclature itself and also the popularity that Lord Ripon enjoyed as the Viceroy of India. The ships carried passengers from Kulna to Barisal and cargo up to Calcutta. But the British Shipping Company *Flotialla Company* finding the decrease in support entered into cut-throat competition to cause attrition to the Indian enterprise. So it carried the passengers and cargo free of cost and also tempted them with free meals on the way. It did attract even those who were otherwise inclined to support the native company out of patriotism. To make the things worse one of the ships met with an accident at the Howrah Bridge and it wrung the curtain down on the Indian effort. The *Flotialla Company* purchased the Indian Company. Ironically the same fate overran the steam navigation company started by Chidambaram Pillai two years later.

With the arousing of the Nationalist Movement, the Companies that emerged in competition to the British Sea-trading interest was that of the *Bengal Steam Navigation Company* of 1905 and the *Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company* of 1906 at Tuticorin.

In July 1905, the Muslim merchants and Zamindars of Chittagong started the *Bengal Steam Navigation Company*, with a capital of one lakh rupees. Similarly a few more navigation companies came up with substantial capitals. Yet in the rat-race of ruthless competition shown by the British shipping Companies, all the native enterprises sank. In fact between years 1905 and 1930 no less than twenty Indian shipping companies in different parts of India with an approximate aggregate capital of ten crores failed. One amongst the ill-fated enterprises was that of Chidambaram Pillai's.

The trade through sea between Tuticorin and Colombo-Ceylon was very flourishing and the British Indian Steam Navigation Company was in monopoly of this trade. A few of the businessman at Tuticorin desired to start a native shipping company. A Government order of 3 October 1906 mentions: "In April some of the Indian Merchants of Tuticorin were arranging to run Swadesh Steamers between Tuticorin and Colombo". This had become a *fait accompli* from a sufficiently earlier date when a

cross reference is found in favour by the news item that Swami Abhedananda arrived at Tuticorin Port from Ceylon by a Swadeshi Steamer on 29 June 1906.

This maiden enterprise was called “Si. Va. Company” perhaps as a token of the interest of the Sivapuram Zamindar in this exercise. This Zamindar was one of the best friends of Chidambaram Pillai.

The ships that floated on behalf of the company were on hire from the Shawline Steamers Company. Observing a new threat to the monopoly, the Assistant Magistrate of Tuticorin Waller came to the rescue of B.I.S.N. Co., and gave a lot of trouble to the native company. Besides using the influence of the Government the English Company coerced the Proprietor of the Bombay Company—Essaji Dodgibhoy—not to lend the ship to the Tuticorin Company and withdraw the same. The effort of the British Company became successful.

V.O.C.'s Venture

This had a lesson on the enterprising men of Tuticorin and Chidambaram Pillai then floated the idea of owing a ship and a new native company had its birth.

In order to make the effort doubly purposeful in the financial aspect as well as in the political aspect every effort was undertaken to launch the ship at an early time. On 16 October 1906 a new *Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company* was registered under the Indian Companies Act of 1882. The details found regarding the Company were: The Capital was to be ten lakh rupees raised by the issue of 40,000 shares at Rs. 25 each. Individuals belonging to Asian Continent were eligible to become shareholders—Pandi Thurai Thevar the Zamindar of Palavanatham and the President of Madurai Tamil Sangam was its President and Chidambaram Pillai became an Assistant Secretary of the new company. The company had 15 Directors with Messrs. H.A.R. Hajee Fakir Mohammed Sait & Sons as the Secretary. In November 1906 an amended version was released and in that Hajee Fakir Mohammed Sait's name was not found.

The objectives in the amended or revised notification were highly laudable :

1. To run ships enabling a care-free and comfortable journey from

Tuticorin to Colombo and also to other places as instructed by the Company for the passengers and to earn through Cargo movement;

2. The Indians, the Ceylonese and others belonging to the Asian Continent are to be trained in the navigational profession and to enable them to enjoy the benefit;
3. To train the above mentioned people in the ship building techniques;
4. To start institutions to teach the youngsters about the ship building industry.
5. To instil unity amongst all races and classes of people belonging to the Asian Continent through this means;
6. To have continuity in business, appointment of Agents in various places in the Asian Continent;
7. To build yards in the sea-coast for harbouring steamers, steam launches and boats and able to repair them if needed; and
8. To undertake such other business and handicrafts as determined by the company management.

A glance at the objectives will reveal that the intention behind the promoters was revolutionary. From the beginning it was planned for a full-size development of navigational commerce and sea-power. Quite naturally, the British Government could not sleep over the matter as it would strike at the very root of their support. In fact when Japan over-ran Russia and conquered the Czar in 1904-1905 war, it was welcome with great excitement as an awakening of the Asian Continent.

The one difference between the other Native Shipping Companies in other parts of India especially in Bengal and in Tuticorin—was the positive presence of confrontation with a monopolistic foreign Government and a sense of anti-imperialism along with economic nationalism in the Tuticorin enterprise but only the business motive in the rest. This alone qualified Chidambaram Pillai to sport and enjoy the sobriquet “Ship-Floating Tamilian”.

To bring to reality the newly formed company, Chidambaram Pillai struggled hard and toured all places in India to raise money

for the same. When he was in Bombay in that connection, his son Lokanathan who was ill seriously when he left, passed away leaving behind the pregnant wife. When informed about that Pillai consoled them that God would stand by them but he himself had to respond to the nation's call.

He wrote to the *Swadesamitran* that arrangements were made to purchase two steamers and two steam launches from Europe and Pillai's friend Vedamurthi Mudaliar had proceeded to Paris in that connection. The two ships with the name *S.S. Galeo* and *S.S. Lavo* arrived at Tuticorin port in May 1907 on different dates. In this accomplishment Chidambaram Pillai was praised unreservedly by all national newspapers and journals.

Bharati in his *India* had praised the services of Chidambaram Pillai thus: "V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and his cohorts have done their duty to the land of their birth"—A rich tribute indeed!

Due to the personal prestige and influence of Chidambaram Pillai, the company did a remarkable business by its floating from Tuticorin to Colombo.

Even when the English Company offered free service, the native company did very fine. Chidambaram Pillai exposed in public meetings the machinations of the English Company with the help of the Government, and the public stood by him.

Unfortunately the shareholders, most of them, did not have the same spirit of Chidambaram Pillai and hence they did not like the harassment of the authorities for even negligible mistakes due to the political activities of Chidambaram Pillai. Their motive was money and not Nationalism. He had to yield to pressure from shareholders and hence he relieved himself from the post of Assistant Secretary to the company and became a paid agent to safeguard the interests of the company and in the end he had to cease from that too. With his total withdrawal from the company's affairs a dark cloud overshadowed the native enterprise.

Chidambaram was broken-hearted at the dissolution of the National Company selling one of the ships to the very British Company who had been their rival. Yet forty years later at the same Tuticorin, attempts were made to float a ship between Tuticorin and Colombo as was the obsession of Chidambaram.

The ship was named *S.S.V.O. Chidambaram* and the first Governor General of Free India C. Rajagopalachari launched the ship. However, this ship too failed to survive for long. The failure was on the part of merchants who had initial enthusiasm but not in a sustained way. The sacrifice that Chidambaram made was not in vain after all. The Central Government took over the responsibility and a bigger and larger vessel with the name *S.S. Chidambaram* is now floating in the eastern seas expanding the horizon contemplated by the selfless patriot Chidambaram.

In the Thick of Freedom Struggle

THE ANCIENT NAME for Tuticorin was Tirumandira Nagar—meaning a City of Holy Chants. With Chidambaram Pillai's unremitting crusade for instilling Nationalism into the minds and hearts of all people irrespective of status and sex, the whole place i.e., Tuticorin and its suburbs resounded with the newly acquired slogan (mantra) for the freedom struggle "Vande Mataram" and thereby converted the place once again as significant as the original nomenclature.

The three-pronged attack on the different planes against the rulers and at the same time a sustained effort to keep the emotion of the participants of the struggle rendered the place Tuticorin a modern Kurukshetra where once again right and justice fought for survival against treachery and domination.

In this battle of wits the weapon on the side of Chidambaram was the unfailing and ever resonant platform oration which at once electrified the audience to quick action of do or die. His aid in this was Subrahmanya Siva and when the two held the platform they behaved like "double-barrelled" gun and fiery words spurted out in torrential flow. This word-weapon was sharp and poignant enough to get them prison-life which made them undergo untold and unimaginable hardships there.

A retracing of steps in the corridor of Congress movement is necessary at this juncture. While the National Congress split itself in principles of action as moderates and extremists, the Government did not bother about the Congress so long as the moderates had the control over the organisation. But once the extremists emerged triumphant and wooed the mass support, the Government felt the first jitters. They brought stringent and repressive measures against their development and expansion of popularity. In some instances the moderates identified (betrayed) the extremists among them to the authorities for special

treatment. This in fact had an adverse effect. Such measures brought the sympathy of the people in larger measures than otherwise they could have got.

The Two Factions—Bharati's View

Subrahmanya Bharati had in an article traced the condition and development of moderates and extremists in Madras Presidency. Unfortunately before it could be published he passed away. Some portions from that article will reveal the real position of the two sides, "The Province of Madras Presidency is to-day (1920-21) regarded as the chief stronghold of Indian Nationalism. But this has not always been so. About ten years ago, it was usual among the few Madras Nationalists to lay much stress on the epithet "benighted". Krishnaswamy Iyer a convinced moderate was the honest believer of the virtues of conciliation and gradual progress under the British aegis. Any other alternative in the political destiny had an alarming prospect for him, ... Thus in the City of Madras and other important towns of the Presidency, the new Nationalist Movement called by them as "extremists" was in check by the moderate forces when Bengal and the Maharashtra were plunging headlong into it. It was only among the Tamil reading middle-class, merchants, landlords, elementary school teachers, petty traders, lawyers, clerks as well as a large section of the Tamil reading ladies, that the new political movement gained much support and adhesion owing chiefly to the labours of the Tamil journals *Swadesamitran* and *India*. The former which is still (then in 1920 and now defunct) the leading Tamil Daily of the presidency was at that time edited by the veteran journalist G. Subrahmanya Iyer. It preached the new gospel of course, and was almost about to be prosecuted on that score. But all the same it could not cut itself altogether away from its old moderate moorings. And consequently it was not looked upon by the younger generation as quite representative of the visions and aspirations of India. That role was taken up by the other weekly journal *India* which advocated openly complete liberty... by constitutional methods... but methods quite different from the mendicancy of the Congress."

Subrahmanya Bharati was requested by Ganesh Krishna Kharpade, the right hand man of Tilak to attend, along with like-minded persons the 1906 Calcutta Congress as delegates. He was

selected as a delegate on behalf of Madras "Bala India" organisation. Along with him three more persons went.

Following Bharatiyar, Chidambaram Pillai and Subrahmanya Siva did much for the cause of Nationalist Party of Tilak.

In the Surat Congress of 1907, the two factions came to a headlong collision. From Madras, delegates attended from both these factions. On 6 December 1907 a meeting was held in the Triplicane Beach to select a delegation for the Surat Congress and Chidambaram Pillai presided. Messers. G. Subrahmanya Iyer, K. Venkataramana Rao, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, C. Subrahmanya Bharati, S.D. Tirumalachari, P.S. Ramamurthi, Ethiraja Surendranath Arya, C. Selvaraja Mudaliar, M.R. Ramesha Iyer, V. Gopalachari, S. Tirumalachari, T.G. Sankaranarayana Iyer, T.V. Hanumantha Rao, C.K. Vyasa Rao, V. Chakkarai Chettiayr, G. Annaji Rao, T. Narayanamurthi, S. Rama Rao and 30 others.

In order to speak about the resolutions passed at the Beach meetings at Surat, a small committee was appointed with K. Venkataramana Rao, C. Subrahmanya Bharati, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, C. Selvaraja Mudaliar and V. Chakkarai Chettiayr.

Surat Congress

The Surat Congress was held in a beautiful place on the bank of River Tapi. Tents were erected and a large and spacious pandal was made for the meeting of about 1400 delegates.

In this connection Chidambaram Pillai recorded: "In those days according to regulations of the Congress, the delegates for the Congress Session are to be selected through an association. All the associations were instructed to send the list of delegates selecting them as per regulations, to Madras. All the Associations in various places did accordingly. Most of them went to Surat by the regular ordinary trains. The delegates of Madras Jana Sangh arranged a special reserved train for the journey to Surat."

The Surat Congress (1907) became a comedy of comedies. Aurobindo in his January issue of *Bande Mataram* (1908) recorded the proceedings in a satirical drama under the title "The slaying of Congress—A Tragedy in three Acts". Leaders of the Congress were the characters in the Drama. In that Tilak

character in one of the dialogues said : “But let me see if we have not the strength of members. Nagpur and Amravati stand behind me, all the Deccan is at my back, Madras has sent a valiant band, Bengal some of her choicest sons, and there are some even from the North, Six hundred stalwart men behind me”.

Even though a satirical drama, the Madras contingent had a good word about them.

Subrahmanya Bharati too wrote a parody “Congress Gita” mingling three languages—English, Tamil and Sanskrit. The first verse was :

“Dharma Kshetre Suratkshetre Samaveta Yuyutsavah!

Mamakah extremists moderateschaiva kimakurvata Sanjay!”

To enable the delegates from Madras to reach Surat, S. Srinivasachariar of Mandayam family and V.O. Chidambaram Pillai rendered financial help so that Tilak might be supported in a massive manner. In fact Chidambaram Pillai left no stone unturned to gather support to Bala Gangadhar Tilak in the Surat Congress. Pillai wanted to make Lala Lajpat Rai as the President of the Congress. Hence he consulted Bharatiyar and like minded persons. As a follow up action, he contacted Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh through correspondence and telegrams. Tilak sent a request telegram to Chidambaram Pillai that he must reach Surat sufficiently early with a large contingent of delegates.

When Aurobindo Ghosh arrived at Surat he went to the place where the adherents of the new party—Nationalist Party—were staying and enquired—“Where is my Pillai?” When people were a bit perplexed he explained—“Don’t you know? He is the most famous national leader Chidambaram Pillai of Tuticorin”. Surrounding persons admired the regard that Chidambaram Pillai was commanding from Aurobindo Ghosh. At that time Pillai came that side and Aurobindo ran towards him and hugged him in affection.

For two days, 24 and 25 December 1907, the meeting of the new party was held and Aurobindo held the chair and Tilak spoke.

In the general Congress session, Tilak was reviewed in bad taste and hand-bills were distributed accusing Shivaji and Tilak. To add to this, even the Presidential speech of Rash Bihari Gosh

contained abuses and references in bad language regarding Tilak, Bharatiyar and Aurobindo Ghosh.

Under these circumstances when the Congress was about to meet on 27 December, Tilak wanted to bring an amendment to the conditions for electing the President and hence wanted to speak. Permission was denied but Tilak got upon the dais and pandemonium prevailed. Chairs were hurled at Tilak. Khaparde and Bharatiyar pounced upon the dais and provided a human cordon before Tilak. M.P.T. Acharya (of Mandayam Family) retaliated the attack. In the meanwhile a moderate delegate from Madras asked the police to arrest Chidambaram Pillai and Bharatiyar identifying them as the cause of the trouble. But the police party went unheeding his request to the dais to control the confusion.

The Congress session ended abruptly having been adjourned *sine die*.

As planned earlier the new party started its work earnestly. An article with the caption "The Congress split and after" was published in *Bala Bharata* issue. An extract of that—"The young and tender shoot—the shoot of Nationalism has now emerged above the group full of silent aspirations towards the high heavens and the first two leaves which it has put forth inclined—seemingly towards opposite directions but connected—be it remembered at one germinal centre, should but gladden the hearts of those who are interested in the development of that priceless plant."

Following the Surat Congress the prestige that Chidambaram Pillai enjoyed shot up. He shot into eminence at All India level on a par with Bala Gangadhar Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh which no South Indian leader got except G. Subrahmanya Iyer.

The new party—Nationalist Party—had three Secretaries—Tilak for Bombay, Aurobindo Ghosh for Bengal and V.O. Chidambaram Pillai for Madras. Be it remembered that at that time, the Madras Presidency contained quite a big chunk of Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam regions besides Tamil. By this appointment, Pillai became very nearly a representative of the whole of South. Regrettable as it is that this unique instance did not find a mention in the records of the Congress History. In the Government Order of 3-October 1911 this fact is noted regarding

Chidambaram Pillai. "Chidambaram Pillai's name was not mentioned in the reports of the Congress Proceedings nor does his return to Madras appear to have been noticed."

On his return from Surat, Mr. Pillai spoke in a public meeting at Triplicane Gangaikoden Mantapam on 11 January 1908. In the course of his speech he mentioned, "After the Surat debacle, the British administration had encouraged and instigated the 'Moderates' to dissociate completely from the 'extremists' in the councils of the Government".

The introduction of "The prevention of seditious meetings Act" and "The Newspapers (incitement to offences) Act" by the Government was only to curb the influence and movement of Chidambaram Pillai, Subrahmanya Siva, Subrahmanya Bharati and G. Subrahmanya Iyer in the main.

Aftermath of Surat Congress

But undaunted Chidambaram Pillai started an organisation by name "Desabhimana Sangam" only for political propaganda in Tirunelveli in 1908 for arranging meeting in and around Tirunelveli—Tuticorin areas. Accompanied by Subrahmanya Siva, he addressed the audiences. Never the two were found on any political platform addressing separately but only together.

It was the time when the labourers and agriculturists were not participants in a larger way in National Liberation Movement as professionalists but only as individuals. Chidambaram's brain pointed out this lacuna and he rose to the occasion to capitalize that.

The labour force was not an organised one at that time and if at all there were protests and strikes it was an individual and isolated affair. That too was only for purely economic content and not for any political cause.

But under the cautious guidance of Tilak, Lajpat Rai, Ajit Singh, Bipin Chandra Pal, B.C. Banerjee, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, and Subrahmanya Siva, the responsible Nationalist Party leaders—the labourers struck work to vindicate their disapproval against "Imperialism and Colonialism".

In the Tamil Nadu, the speeches of Subrahmanya Siva and Chidambaram Pillai sowed the seed of Labour Movement.

Labour Uprise and Swadesiyam

In Tuticorin the English were running a cotton mill by name “The Tuticorin Coral Cotton Mills”. The Management was fleecing the labourers, and was enjoying enormous profits. In those days the labourer was called a “Cooly” and he had to work for the whole day time. Even the “Factory Act of 1911” for the cotton mill workers prescribed a twelve hour work schedule throughout the week. In the Coral Mills, even small mistakes by the labourer was magnified by giving cane punishment. Racial arrogance was evident in their behaviour and attitude towards the labourers.

Having come to know of such disgraceful treatment inside the Mills, Chidambaram Pillai and Siva arranged for meetings of the workers of the Mill and addressed them to bring an awareness. In that task, Padmanabha Ayyangar another social worker and an admirer of Chidambaram also took part. At all the meetings held at Tuticorin during the months of February and March of 1908, all the three were present invariably.

The Russian revolution of 1905-1907, a confrontation between Czar of Russia and Russian Labourers, and its success had caught the observation of Indian leaders and they praised and congratulated the success of the Russian people in their articles and speeches unreservedly.

In fact Gandhi wrote in *Indian Opinion* that the method of Russian Revolutionary could be adopted for advantage while he was in South Africa. Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal explained the practical methods of the revolution in Russia and pointed out the mass character of the movement as well as the general strikes on goodwill and understanding among the participants.

This was brought to the attention of the workers at a meeting of the Coral Mill workers by Subrahmanya Siva with Chidambaram Pillai in the chair on 25 February 1908. He spoke—“The Russian Revolution brought good to the people and revolutions always brought good to the world. If the Indian coolies struck work for a fortnight the mill would be closed and Manchester would starve....By hard work the coolies got 3 or 4 rupees a month, but

the Europeans earned 400 to 500 rupees a month by merely signing their names. In Bengal the coolies of jute Mills struck work and their wages were increased. The same thing happened in the North Western Bengal Railways too.... If the workers in the Mills understand what he said and struck work for three days European capitalists would be the worst sufferers."

Again on 26 of the same month another meeting was held in which the mode of striking was explained. To stalemate the capitalists there were two ways. One was to cause damage to the machines and the other to strike work. The leaders recommended only the second method for adoption as the first method could cause damage to the property and considerable inconvenience to 'both'—labour as well as promoters.

The workers started the strike on 27 morning. The Deputy Superintendent of Police at Tuticorin had in his diary noted that about 200 mill hands had struck work that morning and so the mills had to be closed. This was consequent to the incitement at a meeting on 27 by V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subrahmanya Siva.

Supporting the strike of the workers of the Coral Mills under the guidance of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, the *Swadesamitran*, the Tamil daily, wrote under various headings like—"Tuticorin Coral Mills workers on Strike", "Tuticorin and Swadesiyam", "Our Labour force", "Tuticorin News".

The *Swadesamitran* was flashing the news systematically as if it was giving a running commentary on the developments.

On 28 February Padmanabha Ayyangar distributed hand bills regarding a meeting in the "Dharma Sangam" compound.

The Government officials sent for Chidambaram Pillai and called for an explanation regarding the notice. The "Dharma Sangam" was an organisation for Nationalist Movement started by Chidambaram Pillai already. To avert the police intervention if the meeting was held in a public place, it was arranged to conduct the same inside a private building.

The meeting did take place and Mr. Pillai spoke. The C.I.D. report regarding the meeting, a portion—"Gathering was more than 1000 even though Pillai said that the place would

accommodate only 400. Guards were posted at the gate to prevent the officials from entering. The police preserved order and watched the proceedings from outside.....Siva got up and said that nothing had been done by the Swadeshi party to justify an order being issued by the Collector at the instance of the Europeans prohibiting him and V.O.C. Pillai from delivering speeches. The Europeans were selfish and impatient and so they mistook their innocent words.

“As the strike was in an European mill, the Government took so much trouble to annoy the Swadeshi by sending special Police constables to shoot them down. If the mill was an Indian concern, no interest would have been taken. V.O. Chidambaram Pillai got up and said that he had spoken to the Divisional Magistrate and the District Magistrate. The latter asked him not to deliver speeches which were even likely to do mischief and he had replied that he was a lawyer and knew what was seditious and what loyalty was. He told the District Magistrate that Coral Mills strike was not due to his interference but to the mill-owners starving the coolies. The coolies were children of this land and it was his duty to safeguard their interests. He then made the coolies understand that he had influence and friends all over India and that he had appealed to them for help on their behalf to subscribe money for opening Swadeshi Mill within six months time. During the interval he would get employment and food for them, as all the Vakils had promised a subscription of Rs. 5/- each and some rich Vakils had promised to feed them by turns at a cost of Rs. 75/- per day.”

From this it is clear how systematically the strike was planned by the leaders and what interest they had in the welfare of the workers. It also became a lesson for future organisers to emulate the same.

The two leaders of Tuticorin made the workers realise their own importance and walk with heads erect. This strike was reported in all newspapers of the day.

The Hindu in its issue of 5 March 1908 had the following news : The strike at the Mills show no sign of ending. Yesterday morning the Mill Agent along with others went round the town and begged the people to induce the strikers to resume work. The people refused to co-operate.... The agent sent his brother to

negotiate and bring the strikers round. The strikers declined. They (striking workers) were paid one week's provision from the relief fund raised by Vakil Venkatarama Aiyar."

A Rare Tribute

Aurobindo Ghosh in his *Bande Mataram* issue of 4 March 1908 had this to write:

"The struggle at present in progress at Tuticorin is one of absorbing interest. This is not the first instance in which Madras had shown how deeply it is imbued with the spirit of a strong and enthusiastic Nationalism. But on this occasion there is a note of firm serious strength, united attitude of the people which is proof of a great advance on former outbreaks of Nationalist feeling. Why the authorities should have chosen to apprehend a miniature rebellion in Tuticorin they themselves had known. The people are conducting themselves with a marvellous combination of firmness and dignity, with quiet self-control and have given absolutely no hold to the excited local bureaucrats. We can only suppose that as the self-assertion of Indian labour has evoked the enthusiastic support of the people....The identity of the interests of an administration and exploitation of which Lord Curzon was the prophet is, no doubt, at the root of this unseemly alliance between the Coral Mills and the British Government. The people seem to have found worthy leaders in Sriyith Chidambaram Pillai and Subrahmanya Siva and have so far held their own in the struggle. We await for the developments with interest and with confidence in their courage and discretion."

Again in the 12 March issue, he wrote: "Madras has taken up the *harol* out of our hands and today it is over Tuticorin that the gods of Mahabharat hover in their aerial cars watching the chances of the flight which is to bring back the glorious days of old....The spirit of active heroism and self-immolation has travelled southwards."

It was the Sharp acumen of Chidambaram Pillai to convert the strike of the Coral Mill workers as a national front in the political war instead of a mere fight for wages and better conditions. All sections of people—literate, illiterate, traders, petty merchants, jutka drivers, hotel keepers, washermen and all sections of people heeded the words of Pillai and stood by him. Observing this kind

of healthy co-operation, the Europeans living in Tuticorin became afraid. They stayed in the ships belonging to B.I.S.N. Co., during night times and got provisions and other necessities from Ceylon.

It was not the Europeans alone who were excommunicated from the society but even those Indians who toed the line of Europeans and were branded anti-nationalists. An example will suffice.

One Rangaswamy Iyengar—Vakil and nominated member of the Local Municipal Council—sent for a barber for having a shave. (In those days self-shaving was not in vogue). The barber came and arranged his tools and even applied soap to Iyengar's chin. As ill-luck would have it, Mr. Iyengar blurted out supporting the stance of collector. Immediately the barber asked whether he was an anti-nationalist. On getting a positive reply, he left Mr. Iyengar with unfinished shave.

This was the experience of all from all workmen for all those who were anti-nationalists. This instance brings to our memory the pledge taken by the barbers of Barisal that they would not serve anyone who used foreign goods and articles.

The Joint Magistrate of Tuticorin Mr. Ashe took personal interest in quelling this upsurge and also the influence of Chidambaram. Citing that Law and Order was in stress and in jeopardy he threatened Mr. Pillai with dire consequences if he continued further. Chidambaram on that day's meeting spoke about his meeting with the Joint Magistrate and told the audience that he had informed Mr. Ashe that he would be prepared to be shot at: "Man is borne to die, and one need not be worried how he dies." An Indian was not afraid of death. At long last Subrahmanya Pillai, one of the Directors of the Mills, came to discuss with Chidambaram for settlement. As a result of this meet, the nine day old strike was terminated on 7 March 1908, and the workers resumed their duty.

The *India*, a journal from London reported the strike at the Tuticorin Coral Mills and added "Reconciliation with the strikers was possible only through the instrumentality of Mr. Chidambaram who secured a substantial concession on behalf of the strikers on the 7th instant."

Which demands of the workers were accepted by the

Management are recorded by Chidambaram in his autobiography. The wages were raised by 50%. Sunday was declared holiday for the Mill; Lunch-hour break was accepted; in case of emergency leave was to be granted without wages.

In a felicitation meeting the leaders spoke that their intention was to eliminate arrogance from the administration and not to stop any production. Once again Aurobindo Ghosh lavished his admiration and praise on the success of the strike. "The Tuticorin strike is a perfect example of what an isolated labour revolt should be. The Tuticorin leaders should be given the whole credit—the unequalled skill and courage with which the fight was conducted and still more for the complete realisation of the true inwardness of the Nationalist Gospel which made them identify the interests of the whole Indian National with the grievances of the labourers of the Coral Mill."

The Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company and the struggle of the workers of Coral Mills, brought Tuticorin not only to the focus of the Indian nation but also outside especially London. Political observers of India at various places noticed the development some with satisfaction and others with grumbling.

Pioneer—a journal which supported the British Rule in its issue—reported about the strike and wanted to know the reasons for such developments. It wrote: "This isolated corner of the country in the extreme south of the moderate and rational Madras Presidency, has become a nursery for the rank political growth of Poona and Bengal."

The emergence of Tamil people to merge with the National stream of political consciousness made the British administration think it was a "dangerous sign" and hence decided to bring repressive measures to curb the development. So they decided to invent causes for imprisoning the three—Chidambaram, Siva and Padmanabha Iyengar. An opportunity landed on their laps in the form of celebration meeting on the release of Bipin Chandra Pal.

Chidambaram Pillai had pressure on both sides. The Directors of the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company founded by Chidambaram himself pressed Chidambaram to desist from antagonising the administrators or to leave the company for good and on the other side the British administrators were keeping their ears sharp and eyes wide open to find an excuse to net him for life.

The brave Chidambaram with his robust self-confidence decided to face both. He declined to oblige the Directors of the Company and continued his services for the cause of the Nationalist Movement.

That decision was once again, a turning point in his career and he had to face a series of hardships which none could wish for one's own enemy.

The loss he sustained both in a domestic front and in public life was immense and irredeemable and the next chapter will detail the same.

Repressive Measures and Rigorous Punishment

CHIDAMBARAM PILLAI HAD such a powerful command over all the people around Tirunelveli District that the whole district became a fort to him. Whoever had heard his speech for the freedom of the motherland became his follower. This irritated the government who tried all sorts of repressive measures. Particularly the Collector of Tirunelveli, Mr. Winch and the joint Magistrate of Tuticorin, Mr. Ashe had developed such a hatred towards him that they were waiting for an opportunity to crush him so that he could not come out again to rouse the people against the establishment.

In fact General Dyer who was in charge of army at Punjab had to send a despatch ten years later, i.e., in 1918, to the British Parliament—Secretary of State, that the Brahmins of South India were not to be believed any more, and with them the Pillaimars of Tirunelveli. So something must be done to keep them at bay so that the sedate, passive and sober Madras Presidency could not be snatched away from the moderates who were in no way harmful to the Government. From this despatch one thing becomes clear. That is, for all the uprisings in the Tirunelveli District, Chidambaram Pillai was solely responsible and he did that wonderful feat with the co-operation of Subrahmanya Siva and Padmanabha Ayyangar as aides.

When an opportunity came to the Government in the form of celebrations in connection with the release of Bipin Chandra Pal and Chidambaram Pillai was in full charge of organising that function and also spoke, the Government felt doubly blessed. He was charge-sheeted, tried and punished so severely that not only the people of Tirunelveli District, not only people of Tamil Nadu and journals of Tamil Nadu but the whole of India felt the agony and with one voice criticised the sentence passed on him. In short,

never in the annals of judicial history was so severe a punishment passed for so simple a crime on such a young man as Chidambaram who was only in his late thirties.

A detailed study of the actions and reactions on the part of the European Government will reveal the sufferings and hardships that Chidambaram Pillai had undergone for the sake of the freedom of the country—a sacrifice that none had offered in the whole of the country till the country became free. That punishment was given to Chidambaram Pillai so that it might be a warning and lesson for other freedom fighters of this land—India. In fact for the same or similar actions, Bala Gangadhar Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh were punished very nearly at the same time; but they were not punished in such harsh and merciless manner as Pillai's case was.

After his May 1907 visit to Madras, the reputation of and regard for Bipin Chandra Pal in Tamil Nadu rose rapidly. G. Subrahmanya Iyer, Subrahmanya Bharati, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subrahmanya Siva, saw to it that Pal's name was a household name throughout Tamil Nadu including the hamlets. The imprisonment and release of Pal were of national importance to the Tamil leaders so that when Pal was released celebrations were arranged throughout Madras Presidency on that occasion.

In September 1907, the Bengal Government started prosecution against the famous nationalist party organ, "Bande Mataram", on a charge of sedition and put Sri Aurobindo under arrest as editor. But no one's name was printed in the journal as editor, since in those days, such a declaration was not needed nor insisted upon. But in a close search of the office of *Bande Mataram*, they came across a letter written by Bipin Chandra Pal to Aurobindo Ghosh. So the Government wanted Pal to give evidence on behalf of prosecution, which Pal refused. As a consequence he was charged under contempt of Court and sentenced the maximum of six months simple imprisonment.

The echo of this sentence was heard in Madras. Bharati led protest marches throughout Madras City. Public meetings were held. Bharati and Surendranath Arya spoke. Similarly on 9 March 1908, the release day was celebrated with *eclat* at Madras. Nearly 20,000 people participated in the processions and public meetings. The meeting was held till late 9.00 in the night and it was

a peaceful function. No untoward incident was reported in police records. The Government did not impose any restrictive measures at Madras.

But it was not the case at Tuticorin where Chidambaram Pillai had organized the celebration. The Police imposed many restrictive and repressive measures for the conduct of the functions. Chidambaram, Siva and Padmanabha Ayyangar—all the three had to go to the station for a number of days under the pretext of interrogation and explanation seeking. At last all the three were sent to jail. The chief cause for this severity was the conversion of Tuticorin and its suburbs as a national war front against the British Imperialism by Chidambaram and his cohorts in a systematic manner.

On the occasion of celebrations, many things were planned. 1. To conduct a procession of massive nature with the picture of Bipin Chandra Pal. 2. To build a free dispensary. 3. To start a free Library and Reading Room; and 4. To start publishing a paper—‘Swarajya’. Unfortunately none of these items materialised except the first one. The other things were given a go by because of repressive measures.

The irony was that even before the day of release i.e., 8 March, Government took all precautions and the atmosphere became tense. The District Collector Winch camped there to co-ordinate and supervise the law and order arrangements.

A note in the Archives of Tamil Nadu dated 18 June 1908 runs as follows—“(The Government) issued orders under section 122 C.P.C. and summons under Section 144 I.P.C. to Chidambaram Pillai, Subrahmanya Siva and Padmanabha Ayyangar. The warrant did not deter them from addressing the public meeting. A meeting was held at mosque pettai and about 4000 people attended. In his address Subrahmanya Siva said that he was going to the court next day. He told them that he did not know whether he would return or not. The whole audience was moved. Some began to cry and some to shout. It was a crisis. If Chidambaram Pillai had not got up and pacified the crowd, there would have been a disturbance.”

The programme was not only sought to be dislocated, but the three were asked to appear on the day of the proposed celebration

before the District Magistrate at Tirunelveli, to show cause why Chidambaram Pillai should not be bound over to keep the peace under Sec. 108 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Chidambaram announced in the meeting that they would return from Tirunelveli on ninth and the works would start on tenth of that month. But their plans were shattered.

The three went to Tirunelveli. The local nationalist Sadhu Ganapathy Pantulu, a leading Advocate took the brief of Chidambaram and two more advocates were fixed for the other two persons. The drama of 'Enquiry' started and prolonged till 11 and it became necessary for the three to be present at the Court daily. On ninth Chidambaram gave a petition to permit the transfer of the case to a different Court and he was asked to give an undertaking that he would not go back to Tuticorin. But how could it be possible? The steam ship management had to be supervised, the family of Chidambaram was there and so many other commitments were pending. On the very evening in front of the court premises on the river bank of Tamraparani Chidambaram and Siva addressed a mammoth crowd regarding the release of Bipin Chandra Pal. In fact the release celebrations took place at the date fixed by Chidambaram though the venue was different.

On the tenth morning the Party returned to Tuticorin. A huge crowd gathered in front of the house of Chidambaram. He exhorted the crowd to cherish the ideals of Swaraj whatever be the sacrifice required for that.

Every day the party went to the Court for the hearing of the case and on the evening addressed the crowd gathered just opposite to the Court on the river bank and as usual nationalism and patriotism were the topics. The charges and replies were represented in the autobiography in a poetic form with poetic fancies as "read" (i.e., charges read) and "refuted" (answered). This piece of poem along with that of Bharati who wrote in *India* was presented in the Court as Exhibits 000-1 and 000-2 when Ashe was shot down at Maniyachi by Vanchinathan and prosecuted for that. On the Government side it was pleaded that the writing of Chidambaram was responsible to make the supporters run amuck and do things thoughtlessly even though the reason was contrary.

It was the treatment meted out to Chidambaram at the hands of the Government and Ashe's role in that was a major one, he became the target of attack. The translation provided for the poem of Bharati regarding the Charges and refutation as visualised by him (the author) is as follows as per the Government records—

Collector Winch to Chidambaram Pillai—

1. You have spread the desire for liberty throughout the land and started the conflagration and I will put you in jail and torment you there and establish my strength.
2. You collected crowds and chanted "Vande Mataram" and abused us and you have steamer ships and produced wealth, for us to run away.
3. You spoke to the timid people and transgressed the law. You mockingly said that dying with poverty in the country is peace.
4. You made men out of slaves and dispelled their wretchedness and you released those that were content with poverty and gave them hopes.
5. You incited those who were content with servitude as a profession and thirsted for glory. You showed the way to learn all sorts of industries and lassitude.
6. You induced the desire for Swaraj everywhere and you sowed the seeds of discontent. Can the tiny rabbit do the work of the lordly lion and strive for even more?
7. I will teach order and sense by firing (on the mob) and will kill and stab. Who is there to obstruct? I will put you in prison and wreak vengeance.

Mr. Pillai's reply for the charges—

1. We will no longer be serfs to foreigners in our own land. Fear we will not hereafter—will this injustice be tolerated in any land? Will the Almighty so tolerate (this)?
2. We will bow and until death cry "Vande Mataram". Is it base and degrading to praise our dear mother?
3. Is this perpetual plundering of our wealth to continue and are we to die? Shall we be weeping? Are we not men and is life (Sweet as) jaggery?
4. Are the thirty crores of us ours? And young ones of pigs? Are you alone men? Is it just? Why this stubbornness?

5. Is it sinful to love India? Why do you misunderstand us? Is it wrong to seek deliverance from poverty? Is this hateful?
6. We have considered and understood well that the way of unanimity is the only way. We will no longer be afraid of all your cruelties and lose heart.
7. Can you gain your object even though you cut us to pieces and our life perish thereby? The great love that shines in our hearts—will that go away? Will our hearts grieve?

The threat that Winch gave in the form of “I will put you in prison and wreak vengeance” became a *fait accompli* and he refused to entertain the bail application on behalf of Chidambaram and other accused. He ordered Mr. Pillai to be arrested under Section 107 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Regarding this action, the *India* published from London reported as follows under the date 24 April 1908—the caption—“The troubles at Tuticorin”:

“We have already commented in these columns on the section adopted by Mr. Winch the Collector, as a sequel to certain political demonstrations at Tuticorin—Tinnevely, in taking proceedings against Chidambaram Pillai and two others under Section 107 of the Criminal Procedure Code. By that section, on information being given to a magistrate that any person is likely to commit a breach of peace to disturb the public tranquillity, that person may be called upon to show cause why he should not be ordered to execute a bond for keeping the peace for a period not exceeding one year. Sub-section 4 of the Section further empowers a magistrate, in his discretion, to detain such persons in custody until the completion of enquiry. It was under the latter provision, presumably, that the magistrate of Tinnevely acted in committing Chidambaram Pillai and his companion to prison.”

A report in *The Hindu* regarding this—“The action was taken in connection with meetings and processions organised to celebrate the release of the Bengal Patriot Bipin Chandra Pal. V.O. Chidambaram Pillai himself wired to *The Hindu* a report of the proceedings against him. In subsequent hearings, these patriots were refused bail and they were not given adequate time either to move the High Court. They were remanded to Custody.”

On 22 March 1908, the *Maratha* of Tilak remarked about the order: “It may be wrong to proceed against Mr. Pillai under

Section 107 of the Criminal Procedure Code. But the will of the Magistrate is supreme: It is wrong even when such proceedings have to be taken, to keep a man in actual custody unless an order has been made for taking sureties and the man fails to find that. But when a magistrate takes it into his head to do so, well he may. How can any one prevent him from so doing so long as the High Court has not interfered with him."

After Chidambaram Pillai, Siva and Padmanabha Ayyangar had been put in jail at Palayamkottai, and before the High Court could set aside the order of Winch and declare that section would allow bail, a regular rebellious situation developed by the people of Tinnevelly and Tuticorin. The Government termed that as "Tinnevelly Riots". The result was a volcanic eruption. The people of Tuticorin and Tinnevelly rose as one man to condemn the sentence and the arrest. At dawn a complete and perfect hartal was observed. The public offices and institutions were damaged. The people without caring for anything gave full vent to their emotions. It went to such extremes that they even opened the jails and allowed the prisoners to escape. Collector Winch rushed to the riotous parts with a huge battalion of police, Shooting was resorted to, and four men were the casualties—two Hindus, one Muslim and one Harijan. The people appealed to the shooting party, "Do not shoot us—your own brethren—shoot the alien Europeans."

At Tuticorin the height of riot was observed. Apart from the public, the working men of Coral Mills Best and Company, the Municipal scavengers and last grade servants, jutka drivers and butchers too—all joined the strike.

The strike by the Coral Mill workers lasted for six days from 14 to 19 March. That was only to condemn the arrest of the leader Chidambaram Pillai. That the strike was not for any problem regarding their working conditions or to settle any charter of demands unsettled but only for sole cause of political nature and that was the first instance in which the labour had joined hands with the general public to express their solidarity for political cause.

Later when Tilak was arrested in Poona, then the workers of Bombay Textile Mills struck work in support of Tilak and condemning the arrest for six days July 23 to 28. This strike of the

Bombay Mills workers was described by the versatile political Pandit R. Palm Dutt as “The First Political action of the Indian Proletariate”, but perhaps he was not aware of the earlier strike by the workers of the Coral Mills at Tuticorin. At Tuticorin five hundred workers took part in the strike but in Bombay it was a few thousands. It is not the numerical strength that counts in this kind of expression but only the notion and the motive behind an action. And in that, Tuticorin had the palm and shown the way to the rest of India the method and modalities for that action. In fact the Coral Mill Workers lost substantially by that strike. They lost the increment in their wages which they got by an earlier strike ably conducted and advised by Chidambaram Pillai.

Lenin who closely watched the Bombay Textiles Mills strike wrote in the Proletary—a Bolshevik Newspaper on 23 July 1908 :

“In India the street is beginning to stand up for its writers and political leaders. The infamous sentence pronounced by the British jackals on the Indian Democrat—Tilak—he was sentenced to a long term of exile the revenge against a democract by the lackeys of money bag evoked street demonstrations and strikes in Bombay.”

The opinion expressed by Lenin towards Tilak’s case could very well be applied to the Chidambaram’s case too. It was unfortunate that the information regarding the labour strike for a political cause pioneered at far down South of India, had not reached him. Had it been the case, then Lenin could have been pleased to comment that the political spirit and nationalism had gone deeper into every Indian and it upsurges from the very foot of the country and from every right-thinking Indian.

Following the strikes and bandhs in Tinnevely and Tuticorin, the neighbouring village Tacchanallur too got infected with the strike fever. After strike on 14, with demonstrations at Tacchanallur, arrests were made and about ninety persons were put in custody. One got released and the rest got insufferable punishments. In all the three places, to maintain peace, police battalions were posted and in order to maintain them, punitive fines were levied on all the residents of the three places. However, guidelines were provided for effecting exemptions. In the official correspondence of Winch where the guidelines were given the following points emerged.

Exemptions were granted automatically to Europeans and Christians from fines. The others had to pay the fine. However, the Collector expressed his pleasure that the Brahmins and Vellalas (Pillais) were checkmated in that game.

It should be of interest to observe the reactions of the press at this action. Bharati brought out a cartoon in his *India* issue of 21 March 1908 in a picture of a heap of dynamite—the agitation of the people—and next to that Winch was smoking a cigar—injustice. It exactly depicted how the Collector was aggravating the restlessness of the people who were already posted against the fleecing English administration.

The *Swadesmitran* in its issue of 24 March 1908 wrote a letter in which it was indicated : “At that juncture the people might appear as being afraid but how the administrators like Winch failed to understand the deceptiveness of that apparent fear. The British shoot people and keep them in constant fear. Our people have no weapons to fight back. And the administration had prevented the people to have access to weapons and as cowards they have been crushed and put under their feet. But God has provided in his creation sufficient protective appurtenances for the weaker ones from the ruthless strong. We might not have physical strength but he has provided the mind and with the mental strength coupled with unity, many things might be secured that cannot be got by weapons. The people at Tinnevely and Tuticorin had overstepped the limits and irritated the administrators. Keeping oneself within legal and statutory limits one could observe certain actions which cannot be brushed aside easily. What did the agitators at South Africa do? Did they go about in groups and cause law and order problems by burning buildings etc. No, they resorted to other methods and got victory. We have to adopt Satyagraha pattern observed by Gandhi at South Africa.”

The Hindu deplored the excesses committed by the mob : “It seems to us taking all things together, that the mob was in a state in which they could easily have been made amenable to reason by persuasion and conciliatory methods and so far as we can see no attempt of this kind was made by any of the European officials present.”

Aurobindo Ghosh who was very keenly interested in the Tuticorin affairs wrote five letters regarding the people’s arousal,

one on 22 March under the title, "The Warning from Madras", and the other on 29 March under "Anti-Swadeshi in Madras."

"The outbreak at Tinnevelly is significant as a warning both to the authorities and to the leaders of the popular party. For the bureaucracy, if they have eyes to see or ears to hear, it should be an index of fierceness of the fire which is burning underneath a thin crust of patience and sufferance and may at any moment lead to a general conflagration....Some years ago agitators might have spoken themselves hoarse and yet there would have been no such upsurging of the population of a whole city in the reckless revolt against established authority. Still more significant is the defiant spirit of the people, neither the imprisonment of the people nor the shots of the military could quell; but rather lashed into fiercer rage. This is no fire of straw, but a jet of volcanic fire from the depths and that has never in the world's history been conquered by repression....At Tuticorin it was the inspiring voices, the cheerful and confident faces, the strong and calm example of their leaders in which the people felt their strength and enabled them also to act with a restrained enthusiasm and....courage. The removal of that inspiring, yet quieting faces led inevitably to the resort to violence which has startled the whole country by its devastating fierceness—though at the same time it was mild enough compared with what an European mob would have done at a similar pitch of excitement."

The second one is of equal interest and a section of it is: "The Madras Standard has undoubtedly hit the right nail on the head when it derives the Tinnevelly disturbances from the establishment of the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company and the attempt to throw difficulties in the way of its success. The struggle generated an acute feeling on both sides and when the commercial war extended itself and people took sides with Indian Labour against British capital in the affairs of the Coral Mills, the patience of the English officials gave way and they rushed to the help of their mercantile caste fellows, misusing the sacred seal of Justice and the strong arm of Power as instruments to maintain their trade supremacy. Their unjust and unwarrantable action has been responsible for the riots and the corpses of dead men lying with their gaping wounds uncared for in Tinnevelly streets... uncared for but not forgotten in the book of divine reckoning."

The *Mahratta* issue of 22 March contained an article under "The Tinnevelly Riots" a part of which is—The Tinnevelly riots which occurred on the thirteenth instant are calculated to prove a landmark in the history of practical politics in the Southern Presidency. We say so advisedly because while on the one hand the riots could be really traced back to labour strike which had no political character, still they will be handed down to posterity as associated in memory with the awakening of strong popular discontent which is undoubtedly a phase of practical politics. Mr. Pillai had done a good deal for shopkeepers in Tuticorin and Tinneveli and so naturally they resented the unjust treatment given to him and closed the shops...."

A question was raised in the British Parliament at London regarding this sentence. Mr. Rees asked the Secretary of State for India whether he could give the House any information regarding a riot in Tinnevelly.

The answer was: "I am informed that a riot occurred in Tinnevelly on Saturday in which the Municipal, Post and Police offices were looted and burnt. Being unable to clear the streets, the Magistrate and Superintendent of Police ordered the police to fire and rioting ceased. Some casualties were reported."

In the Madras Assembly a question was asked.

B. Narasimhesvara Sarma Garu wanted to know the details regarding the Tinneveli riots and the reply by the Government was :

"The number killed is reported to have been four, but the number wounded is not known. Buck shot was used at first. The rioters were fired upon by the Reserve Policy—once in the main street leading to the Temple and a second time near the police station... The exact number of the mob is unknown but estimated at several thousands...."

There were a number of protest meetings and processions against the arrest of Chidambaram Pillai, Siva and Padmanabha Ayyangar throughout Tamil Nadu. That which took place in Karur attracts a special mention. On 17 March, one Conjeevaram Krishnaswami Sarma of 15 years of age addressed the meeting virulently condemning the actions of the Government. For his speech he was sentenced to five years of imprisonment and

transportation. On appeal the sentence was reduced to three years.

The report about this trial appeared in Telugu Paper named *Krishna Patrika* on 5 July 1908 and it was as follows:

“On 17 March Krishnaswami Sarma addressed a public meeting at Karur. In his address he exhorted that as Tuticorin people had demolished the foreign Courts, of the Collector, Munsiff and Police, why the Karur people also should not follow suit? There were low paid personnel in the army and in order to protect Mother India why did they not shoot the white faces and advance Swadeshi?”

In September of the same year, the *Lawyer* carried the item as :

“For the seditious proceedings Krishnaswamy Sarma was convicted under Section 124A, 153A and 505 I.P.C. and sentenced to five years transportation on 14 September. Under 124A, and no sentence was passed under other sections. While sentencing the judge remarked, “I see clearly that inflammatory speeches are more dangerous in the mofussil than in Madras where British troops are immediately available.”

Subrahmanya Bharati arranged for a meeting at Madras in protest under the auspices of Jana Sangh and also arranged for fund collection to help the family of V.O.C. and also to meet the expenses of the court cases.

The echo of the Tirunelvelly riots was found in the London papers too. The paper *Indian Sociologist** of the Indian Home Rule Society commented as follows in its April issue.

“To judge from the brutal murders of unarmed innocent Indians who recently assembled at Tinnevely to express their joy at the release of Bipin Chandra Pal from Jail and who were butchered at the instance of the British Government, the safest

* In 1905, Pandit Shyamji Krishna Varma, started in London an institution called—“Indian Home Rule Society”. This organisation supported the view of Bala Gangadhar Tilak and expressed its views for the benefit of like minded persons living in London and also to propagate the feelings of Indians against the British Administration in India through its organ—“The Indian Sociologist”. Besides, he started a lodging house called—*India House* in which radicals like Veer Savarkar, V.V.S. Ayyar, Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, M.P.T. Acharya, Madanlal Dhingra and others stayed and gave fillip to the cause of India through radical methods.

plan for Indians would seem to be to organise secret and determined and combined disaffection as suggested by a European friend.”

In the meanwhile Mr. Winch was exerting himself to find out sufficiently powerful clauses of I.P.C. to attract their influence over the action taken by him so that Chidambaram, specially, and his cohorts Siva and Padmanabha Ayyangar whom he sentenced, were not to get his sentence set aside on appeal to the High Court. So he wrote a letter to the Government on 17 March 1908 seeking the permission of the Government to proceed against the three under Sections 124A and 153A.

Besides he wrote “Subrahmanya Siva has been the worst of the three agitators, but the other two have made speeches similar in tone and have aided and abetted the propaganda the parties concerned are, I understand, moving the High Court for transfer of the case from my file on the allegation, of course that they cannot expect a fair trial in my court... at the present anxiety having had to do any magisterial work for several years, lest I might walk into some trap and make some slip which would vitiate the whole proceedings.”

The High court discussed the appeal and ordered that the three might be allowed on bail. Immediately the merchants of Tuticorin joined together and moved for bail to release Chidambaram Pillai from jail. But he declined and disagreed with the intention of his bailers. While two other close friends were languishing in jail for the same crime, he refused to be released unless and until all the three were released together.

The *Swadesamitran* commented very nicely and complimented Mr. Pillai for his gesture of comradeship to his colleagues. It said in that course—“The idea of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is eschewed in matters of religion, the God and Devotee became ‘one’. Similarly this eschewal of these things would render the person an exemplary patriot and Mr. Pillai’s action is the definition of Patriotism.” Aurobindo Ghosh went one step ahead and called Mr. Pillai as a complete and perfect example of an Aryan Reborn. Hailing his action as “Well done Chidambaram” he wrote in his *Bande Mataram* issue of 27 March.

The full text is reproduced to enable to understand the regard

Aurobindo had for Chidambaram Pillai and what sort of friendship existed between the two. It also helps to contrast the attitude of the people in general at the present juncture when rank selfishness reigns supreme and no holds barred to achieve their end despite even betrayal of the land and the friendship.

“A true feeling of comradeship is the salt of political life; it binds men together and is the cement of all associated action. When a political leader is prepared to suffer for the sake of his followers, when a man, famous and adored by the public, is ready to remain in jail rather than leave his followers and fellow-workers behind, it is a sign that political life in India is becoming a reality. Srijit Chidambaram Pillai has shown throughout the Tuticorin affair a loftiness of character, a practical energy united with high moral idealism which show that he is a true Nationalist. His refusal to accept release on bail if his fellow-workers were left behind, is one more count in the reckoning. Nationalism is or ought to be not merely a political creed but a religious aspiration and a moral attitude. Its business is to build up Indian character by educating it to heroic self-sacrifice and magnificent ambitions, to restore the tone of nobility which it has lost and bring back the ideas of the ancient Aryan gentleman. The qualities of courage, frankness, love and justice are the stuff of which a nationalist should be made. All honour to Chidambaram Pillai for having shown us the first complete example of an Aryan reborn, and all honour to Madras which has produced such a man.”

Following this encomium of Aurobindo Ghosh, Bharatiyar in his *India* of 25 April—has described him as “man of Action ” (Karma Viran), “first Aryan Person” and “an exemplary sacrificer” (Uyarnda Parityagi).

The administration proceeded against Subrahmanya Siva under section 124A of I.P.C. This section prohibits a person from freedom of speech and was notoriously popular as a “man lifting statute.” Siva was charged for his public speeches at Tuticorin on 23, 25 and 26 of February and on 5 March 1908 as containing sedition.

Similarly on Chidambaram Pillai for his public speeches on 23, 25 and 26 February and also on 5 March under section 124A and under section 153A, for having given protection, shelter and food to Siva—a traitor and seditionist. The cases were presented on

March 26 in the Court of E.H. Wallace—the District Additional Magistrate, Tirunelvely. After preliminary enquiries the Additional Magistrate committed the case to the Session Court.

The Sessions Judge, A.F. Phinhey took up the case and enquired Mr. Cowdell, Mr. Peter and Sadhu Ganapathi Pantulu who were advocates for Siva. Satakopachariar, Narasimhachari and Venkatachari appeared on behalf of Chidambaram Pillai.

In his autobiography, Chidambaram has recorded about the hearings of the case as 'a Parody' and not a serious one out of which justice could be got. He quoted the recordings of *Yugantar*. This journal from Bengal was started by Fanindra Kumar Ghosh, Abhinath Bhattacharya and Bhupendranath in 1906. This paper completely covered the case and issued special supplements too and branded the proceedings as a farce.

Bharatiyar in his *India* issue of 18 March had written as follows:

"It is a cent percent truth that the trial and enquiry on Chidambaram Pillai is a farce. As one reads the text of the speech, there is no indication of sedition. Yet the authorities are trying hard to prove that riots and unlawful conditions were due to his speeches. One has to admire Mr. Pillai's calmness and fortitude at this juncture.

Again a few weeks later he appealed to the people to contribute liberally to conduct the cases against Mr. Pillai. His appeal to the Steam Navigation Company was very moving. He said that Mr. Pillai was very nearly the father of the company and in the circumstances that Mr. Pillai had to be in distress and difficulties it was the duty of the Board of Directors to come to the rescue of Mr. Pillai. Moreover the company was in a good condition too and hence if they failed to help either due to indifference or due to the fear of authorities, any way, Dharma—righteousness would avenge their inaction.

But the Sub-Collector Ashe saw to it that all sorts of threats were issued to the members of the Governing Body of the Company that they could not think of anything else except to safeguard themselves and the company. Hence it was small wonder that they could not come to the rescue of Mr. Pillai. Mr. Pillai on being again remanded to Police custody in spite of High

Court's order for release, sent an appeal to the company Directors which would move any one and unfortunately the words became prophetic.

“Brethren! I am in prison now. The future of mine is in the lap of God. I know you are all interested in me and show concern and consideration. What needs your concern and consideration is the shipping company of ours. The company was not started for making gains to be shared by the shareholders. It is the temple of our Mother India. It is our sacred duty to cherish the company. If the company becomes a prey to the machinations of foreign enemies or their well-wishers, it is a shame unto us. If the company survives the trials and tribulations, then it is not the victory for the company shareholders but it is a victory of the Patriotism. It is a moral gain to Mother India.” But the company was tossed like a rudderless ship in troubled waters by the authorities.

Subrahmanya Bharati and Surendranath Arya were summoned by the Court to offer evidence which took place from 10.6.1908 to 24.6.1908. However, the authorities had decided to bring in all sections of I.P.C. to give a heinous form of sentence. The sessions Judge Phinhey spelt out his judgement that Subrahmanya Siva and Chidambaram Pillai had attracted all the sections of I.P.C. to deserve a deterrant punishment because of their speeches and there was no expression of regret either in their attitude or behaviour. Chidambaram Pillai was sentenced to 40 years of exile and transportation for life on two counts. Twenty years for seditious speech and 20 years for abetting Siva for his fiery lectures—the sentences to run one after another. Siva was transported for 10 years for seditious speech.

The remarks of the session judge are very important in that context. He said: “To speak like that in the assembly of people who have no voting rights, will only provoke them and let loose the unlawful conditions. Unlike in Britain, the people cannot speak political affairs as they have no voting rights to check the Government. In the absence of such political rights, only physical violence will be the result. This is a very dangerous situation.” In addition he said—“it seems to me that Siva was a tool in the hands of second accused (Mr. Pillai).” On hearing the verdict on Mr. Pillai, his brother Meenakshi Sundaram lost his balance of mind and spent his whole life as a mental case.

Swadesamitran wrote in its editorial on 10 July: "It is funny to look at that for one it was 10 years and for the other, for the same alleged crime, it was 40 years. Of late the trials under sedition are on the increase and they are being tried only by European judges. But nowhere such a severe and unheard of punishment was given. Tilak was tried for sedition and ordered rigorous imprisonment for one and half years but on appeal to the Government it was reduced to one year. All such similar cases attracted only a sentence of maximum two years and not like the one offered by Judge Phinhey. At Bombay an editor of a paper who was of very old age was sentenced by a judge to 14 years of transportation but on appeal to the High Court it was reduced to one year. No instance was there when a sedition case was tried and left acquitted. At all instances these were punishments, and people expected a harsh sentence on Mr. Pillai but ultimately when the sentence was pronounced it was breath-taking and people fainted at the gravity of the sentence. The prosecution Advocate had pleaded that in Madras Presidency so far there was no case under sedition and now it has reared its head, hence a hard punishment is to be given so that it can be deterrant and a lesson to others.

"One thing must be said. It was not because the prosecuting Advocate Pollock had pleaded for a harsh sentence that the judge complied with his request, but even otherwise he could have given even if he had pleaded for a lesser one."

This punishment had stirred the nation. This sentence made a revolt on Lord Morley, Secretary of State for India and he wrote privately to Lord Minto—the Governor General in India—in July 1908:

"I must confess to you that I am watching with deepest concern and dismay the thundering sentences that are now being passed for sedition.... The sentences on two Tinnevely—Tuticorin men are wholly indefensible—one gets transportation for life and the other for 10 years.... I cannot on any terms whatever content to defend such monstrous things. I do therefore, urgently solicit your attention to these wrongs and follies. We must keep order but excess of severity is not the path to order. On the contrary it is the path to the bomb."

Following severe criticisms from all parts of India—both Press and People—the judge was transferred to another province.

An appeal against this sentence was preferred in the High Court by Mr. Pillai and Siva. The gist of the speeches made by Chidambaram and Siva was presented to the Court and the judges rendered the speeches as follows:

“In all the speeches, there is a word of dissent. Absolute Swaraj is to be arrived at by means of boycott and abstention from all recourse to the authorities. Swaraj through boycott is the burden of the speeches and the Swaraj aimed at involves the departure of all foreigners from India... he (Pillai) organised the series of speeches with Subrahmanya Siva in which Siva's role was that of a political propagandist while he himself followed up with economic disquisition. But each entered from time to time on the other's ground and the goal to which both pointed was the departure of all things foreign from the land and the resultant was Swaraj and Prosperity.”

On 4 November 1908, Chief Justice Arnold Wright and Judge Munroe passed their verdicts. They agreed with the decision of the lower court but reduced the sentences. The sentence of Transportation for life on Chidambaram for sedition was reduced to six years of transportation and the sentence for abetment was reduced to four years transportation—both sentences running concurrently.

Again an appeal was preferred in the Privy Council in which the sentence of Transportation was reduced to rigorous imprisonment. It was curious and fateful coincidence that just before and after Chidambaram was put in jail, Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh too were sentenced and put in jail. Ghosh was sentenced for involvement in Alipore riots and was put in solitary confinement. Tilak was sentenced for his article in the journal *Kesari* on “The Country's Misfortune.” In the trial of Tilak in July 1908, he was sentenced to six years of rigorous imprisonment.

When Chidambaram, Tilak and Aurobindo entered jails, Bharati wrote in *India* of 8 January 1910 under “New Pilgrim Centres of Bharatam” that the jails had become new holy places and pilgrim centres because of these people.

When admirers and ardent followers visited Chidambaram at Coimbatore Central Jail, he assured them that he would return soon and exhorted them not to lose heart but to continue the fight

for freedom. He pleaded that National Steam Navigation Co. must be maintained in a good manner.

Chidambaram Pillai who was put in a condemned cell on 9 July 1908 got the release only after 1912. Tilak, his political Guru, was kept in a cell at Mandalay and was released in 1914 which facts Chidambaram himself had recorded in one of his articles on Tilak.

“In the middle of 1908, I was convicted for sedition and was sentenced to transportation for life. After some months, my Guru also was convicted for sedition and was sentenced to transportation for six years. On appeal, my sentence was reduced to transportation for six years. I was detained in the central jail at Coimbatore and was released in 1912. My Guru was detained at Mandalay and was released in 1914.”

VII

In the Prison

DESPITE THE SENTENCE of six years which was the result of prolonged and persistent efforts to the various highest courts of justice as appeal against the spell of 40 years, in actual practice, the period became reduced to four and half years only due to 'remission'. This period Chidambaram spent not at one place but in two different places. First at Coimbatore Central Jail for two and half years and then at Cannanore Jail for two years. Chidambaram gave a detailed account of his experiences as a 'prisoner' in his autobiography.

At Coimbatore

He was sent to the Central Jail at Coimbatore on 9 July 1908. Without any concern for his social status, professional equipment or hereditary weightage, Chidambaram was interned along with diehard and cut-throat criminals. But little did he deflect from his steadfast principles, forbearance and fortitude which earned for him the regard and respect from fellow-prisoners tending to become affection and love. It became necessary for him to do all the hard and difficult-to-perform works pertaining to the sentence-bound magnitude*. He was asked to spin jute-yarn by hand-rotating machine by which act his palms got blisters with burning sensation and occasionally blood oozed out of the palms.

He was made to drag the country-oil-expeller (sekku) round and round in the open air to crush the seeds for oil instead of bullocks or any other draught animal. Without any demur he did all that for the sake of the motherland. Because of this he got the compliment Sekkizhutha Semmal—the noble one who dragged the country-oil-expeller. This he did throughout the daytime even under scorching sun. Unable to bear this sight, his co-prisoners struck a deal with him after a lot of persuasion that he would draw

* Subrahmanya Bharati and Namakkal Kavignar Ramalingam Pillai have composed verses about the hardships of V.O.C. at the jail.

only at such times when the work was supervised by jailors and Superintendent and that they would do the same for him at other times. This fact Chidambaram records with gratefulness in his memoirs.

Subrahmanya Bharati in his *India* issue of 28 November 1908 has this to inform—"Alas, the heart flutters when we think of this cruel treatment and the hand trembles when we write about it." What he has in mind was the ill-treatment and even flogging by the jailors when Chidambaram was slow in his rounds or stopped a while being unable to go round.

This country expeller or contrivance was of a two-piece item of granite stone. In due course of time it got buried in the earth but was unearthed in 1972. Of these two parts, one part is kept in the Government Estate as an exhibit and the other is still at Coimbatore Central Jail.

Unable to withstand the oppressive treatment of the jailors, the convicts rebelled. A jailor was assaulted. Thirty-four prisoners were charge-sheeted and proceeded against. They were sentenced for four years imprisonment. Against three a case was registered for having attempted to murder the jailor and were sentenced to 10 years. In these cases Chidambaram was examined as defence witness. He affirmed—"The treatment of the prisoners by the jailors was inhuman. The food served was full of mud-clots and stones. Work was extracted mercilessly from them even beyond their capacity and no rest was allowed, facilities for bath, sleep etc., were scanty and any amount of complaint about these were of no avail even with higher ups. Hence because of these circumstances, the prisoners could have been provoked to rebel and behave in that manner."

After the event, Chidambaram was considered a non-desirable person to be put along with other prisoners as it would result in more and more organised upheavals. The authorities segregated him, put him in a single cell and ordered him to spin the thread and twist the same.

While the general trend was like this, one warden took some concern and sympathy towards him and brought him *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, *The Hindu*, *Swadeshmitran* and other newspapers to read. This was noticed by the people above and the

warden was charged and given three months rigorous imprisonment. Knowing about the treatment meted out to the good samaritan, Chidambaram helped him with some amount with which he, after his release, opened a shop for his livelihood.

After sometime, Chidambaram was ordered to do the work of a compositor for preparing the printing matter. He underwent the ordeal too. Because of his routine like this, he was reduced to 110 pounds in weight as against 130 when he entered the jail.

As if the afflictions—external—are not sufficient, Chidambaram had the share of mental agonies too. The news that the ships belonging to the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company were sold to the very same British Company against which he fought valiantly and relentlessly, was a bolt from the blue. It was a humiliation for him far beyond expression. When Bharati heard about it, he expressed his disapproval and anger when he met Chidambaram in person later at Pondicherry thus: "Honour is great and important. For a few chips the ships were sold to the very enemies by the cut-throats. They could have smashed the ships into smithereens and thrown them into the sea. Will India sink if a few chips were lost?"

Not stopping with the sale of the ships to the enemies, the members of the management of the Swadeshi Company demanded compensation from Chidambaram. They contended that due to the political interference of Chidambaram alone the Company had to lose business and hence had to be closed. So the chief cause for these, they said, was Mr. Pillai. Chidambaram wrote a letter to C. Vijayaraghavachari who was the legal adviser to the Swadeshi Company. According to M.P. Sivagnanam, he wrote, "The loss incurred by the Company must be borne by the share-holders of the Company and not by anyone else as per natural law. Yet if they refuse to accept the liabilities, then he (Pillai) would step in and pay off all the debts."

At this height of agony—both physical and mental which sustained him to keep his balance was his taste in literature and faith in God. He spent his time in translating the English book, *As a man thinketh* of James Allen into Tamil.

In the meantime he was transferred to Cannanore Jail on 1 December 1910. The transfer in effect was a better turn to him.

Treatment was not that severe as in Coimbatore Jail. In fact the jail authorities treated him with considerable respect and regard. This fact Chidambaram has recorded in his autobiography.

It was while he was at Cannanore Jail, Chidambaram heard about Vanchinathan Iyer shooting Collector Ashe. A junior Sub-Assistant Surgeon of the jail conveyed the news to Chidambaram that Vanchinathan shot at the Collector and also shot himself at Maniyachi Junction.* On hearing the news, Chidambaram applauded the news conveyor as a harbinger of good news and wished him many more good things and long life. He pointed out to him that Ashe was responsible for his imprisonment, the dissolution of the Swadeshi Steamship Company and for all repressive measures at Tinnevely, and it was good that Vanchi shot him.

In his autobiography, he had lavished praise on Vanchinathan for his act of martyrdom but in the letter to Vijayaraghavachari, he had expressed his displeasure of violence. That may appear paradoxical or enigmatic for the present day readers.

One must transport mentally to the then prevailing situation for correct appraisal of events and instances. Expediency or political diplomacy could have dictated such a course of action at that time, and many a great leader had done that to save the situation from getting worse or with a concern for the fall-out as its consequence. One must remember that Chidambaram's letter was to the legal adviser to the Company and hence would be subjected to censor. Lest it should create worse situations, a line of that nature would soften the embers that would otherwise emerge.

Even at Cannanore Jail, Chidambaram took interest in the welfare of the co-prisoners. When they did not get their due, particularly remission of a sentence etc. in time, he used to write to *The Hindu* regarding Jail conditions and thus enabled them to enjoy the benefits.

Here too he continued his literary pursuits. Instead of

* On 17 June 1911 at 10.40 a.m. at Maniyachi Junction—Vanchi shot Collector Ashe and shot himself too. His action will make one recollect the brave acts of Khudiram Bose and Madanlal Dhingra. Dhingra, an extremist, shot Curzon Vallie in 1908 at London. This was the first shot of the Indian Revolution at London far away from India for the Indian Freedom.

translating he wrote some original treatises like *Meyyarivu* (True Wisdom) *Meyyaram* (True Dharma) etc.

The time for release was fast approaching and the countdown was exciting to the authorities to a feverish end. Having experienced the spontaneous gathering of people in an uncontrollable manner at the Tuticorin Railway station in 1908, when he was taken to prison, the authorities got ready to meet any emergency that might crop up at the time of his release.

A part of the correspondence that the District Police Superintendent (C.I.D.) wrote to the Deputy Inspector General (Railway) and to the Railway authorities on 25 October 1912, is as follows:

“V.O.C. is to be released on 24 December 1912. He must be under observation forthwith. His movements must be reported to me by wire. If he returns to Tinnevely, persons who meet him must be observed and for that persons will be posted at all stations. This must be recorded at each police station as and when things develop. In the Tinnevely district, where he stays, there his activities are to be watched. For this one sub inspector and a head constable should be allotted. That must be noted in that local police station and whoever comes to meet him must be noted as ‘suspected one’ and recorded as such with that person’s antecedents.”

But unfortunately what was expected by the police and the administrators did not take place.

He was released on 24 December. At the gate, Swami Vallinayagam, V.O.C.’s wife, sons, brother-in-law and friend Ganapathi were present.

Siva who was released a few days earlier i.e. on 2 November 1912 was there as a sole representative of public persons who toiled with Chidambaram for the freedom, fully afflicted with leprosy. What a travesty! The fighting hero Siva who knew nothing except to struggle for Motherland’s freedom from foreign yoke, got the fell disease as a prize. Due to the repressive measures of the Government, the very public which made Chidambaram a hero and a Virapurusha, ignored him totally. The time-wheel had turned a full turn.

In that new atmosphere, how Chidambaram carried his mission of freedom fight is worth watching. His involvement in the Trade Union and Labour Force, his reactions to the Home Rule Movement of Annie Besant apart from the new culture and atmosphere imported to the political arena with the twin principles of Satyagraha and Non-violence by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi are all worth noting. How an ardent advocate of Tilak and follower of his principle of extremism got adjusted or reconciled to the new atmosphere, are all the contents of the subsequent chapter.

VIII

Post-Release Attitudes

CHIDAMBARAM PILLAI ON release from Cannanore Jail neither went to his native village Ottappidaram nor to his erstwhile field of political activity, Tuticorin, but went to Madras and set up his family. With his Sannad to practice being confiscated he could not restart his legal profession. Wherewithal to maintain a family became a big question mark before him. He tried at opening a grocery and general store but failed in that. Started to deal with Kerosene mandy in which too he lost considerably. In those circumstances, Mandayam Srinivasachari alone was the financial prop for all indigent patriots and he helped Chidambaram considerably.

It was the time when at Madras, Wadia, Arundale, Thiru Vi.Ka., V. Chakkarai Chettiar, Singaravelu Chettiar, Dr. P. Varadarajulu Nayudu, Selvapathi Chettiar, Ramanujulu Chettiar, N. Dandapani Pillai, E.L. Iyer and others were labouring hard to found labour unions.

Chidambaram, as he was living at Perambur then, naturally had occasions to have friendship with a few of them, and in particular with N. Dandapani Pillai and Dr. P. Varadarajulu Nayudu. Since he had already had the experience in organizing the labour union with the workers of Coral Mills at Tuticorin, Chidambaram involved himself in the pursuits at Madras too. As chance would have it, Siva too was at Madras at that time and hence once again the two got themselves involved in labour unions.

Meanwhile Chidambaram made a trip to Pondicherry. The place was under the control of the French and hence political rebels and patriots found a natural haven there wherein the British imperialistic order would have no effect. The Tamil journals like *India*, *Suryodayam*, *Dharmam*, *Karmayoga* and others were issued from Pondicherry and they were very popular with the Tamil Nadu of the British India.

Subrahmanya Bharati, V.V.S. Iyer, Mandayam Srinivasachari, Aurobindo Ghosh and others on whom the British administration had an observant eye migrated to Pondicherry for free movement and activities. Hence in those days Pondicherry became a pilgrimage centre for politicians of British India, particularly to those who became *persona non-grata* to the administration. Surendranath Arya and Subrahmanya Siva too went to Pondy for consultations and advice, and Chidambaram had to say this regarding his trip to Pondy in his autobiography. "After being released from the Cannanore Jail, I came straight to Madras with my family. I went to Pondicherry and traced out the residence of Bharati after enquiry. The family was happy to receive me. I dined there and enjoyed the poems of Bharati for a couple of days. We, Bharati and myself, went to the bungalow of Aurobindo Ghosh. I did not see Aurobindo as a sage—rishi—as many told me about him, but only as a devotee of the Nation like many of us and also as a nationalist leader."

The last line reveals that Aurobindo talked to Chidambaram for a long time only about nation's problems. It is noteworthy in this context that when Chidambaram met him he (Aurobindo) had not relegated politics to the background and begun to take to Yoga and be called the Yogi or Sage of Pondicherry.

Chidambaram continues in his autobiography—"To rescue the administration from the alien hands, we discussed about many ways. It had become a regular feature daily. One day I suggested to him that we must take efforts to spread the message of ours—the Swaraj—throughout the world. For that we must publish journals in twenty seven languages to reach all kinds of people throughout the world. To find the funds for the same, I suggested that we could collect the same from our people."

It may appear fantastic to any one at present. But even viewed from the journalistic aspect it might be an impossible, if not an improbable task. We will miss the chief point if we fail to recognise the depth of nationalistic spirit and the need for Swaraj in the plans of Chidambaram. But unfortunately due to various causes, the plan remained only in expression and not in practice.

Despite release, Chidambaram was in surveillance of the Police.

For the first time, a labour union under the name Madras

Labour Union—was formed in 1918 at Madras with Wadia—one of the leaders of the Home Rule Movement—as President Gooty P. Kesava Pillai—the congressite and Thiru V. Kalyanasundaram as Vice-Presidents and Ramanujulu Naidu and Selvapathi Chettiar as Secretaries. It can be noted that in the list of persons who interested themselves in the Labour Union, given by Thiru Vi.Ka. the name of Chidambaram can also be found. Chidambaram in fact, took active interest in the affairs of the labour. On 30 January 1919, he presided over a meeting of the Tramway Labour Union when Subrahmanya Siva spoke. In his presidential address, he exhorted the workers that they must save to their capacity for the lean period and they must resort to strike only in an extremely unbearable circumstance. The administration would side only the employers and never the employees, which fact they should bear in mind always, and hence all the employees in the Tramway Company should become the members of the Union.

That Chidambaram had led labour processions and addressed them is noted by N. Dandapani Pillai in “V.O.C. Centenary Volume”: “Setting aside other engagements, for the first time Chidambaram attended the meeting of the Union for which I am the Chief. At a time when there was no public address system—loudspeaker aids—he spoke raising his voice and roared like a lion to reach all members of the meeting. The same meeting was addressed by Thiru Vi.Ka. and Kasturi Ranga Ayyangar of *The Hindu* later. The assembly was advised to disperse smoothly after the conclusion and it was a wonder that many thousands of people dispersed smoothly without any hitch at Choolai Pattalam—near Perambur.”

At a meeting of the Railway labourers at Nagapattinam, Chidambaram pointed out to them the strength and force of the Labour as against the British Imperialism. A record about that—is in “National Movements in Madras Presidency” by R. Shanmugasamy: “On 14 April 1920 at a labour meeting at Nagapattinam, V.O.C. said there are powers to the British Government—Posts, Telegraph, Police and the Railways. These are the four walls of the British Government and of this if one wall collapses, the British Government would at once collapse... Therefore, brethren! if you want to better your status, you must co-operate with your union and not to do anything expecting that

the Government would help you.... There are unions in Villupuram and other places. We have organised unions in places not known to the Police.”

At the time amidst labour force, Annie Besant, Wadia and Arundale, all interested in the welfare of the labourer, were very popular. Chidambaram who had sworn enmity towards Annie Besant on political grounds, distributed pamphlets amongst labourers to play down against the aforementioned persons, inspite of their interests in the Labour Unions. One among them for instance was addressed to the Railway Union entitled—A warning to the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway Labourers, criticising Annie Besant and her cohorts for their interests in securing positions in the Union, he said; “Oh Indian Labourers, Oh Indian Vakils, Oh Indian patriots! wake up, wake up; Get rid of our enemies, Mrs. Besant and her followers from all Labour Unions.” But the support for the tirade against Annie Besant did not forthcome from Thiru Vi.Ka., Dandapani Pillai and other chief labour leaders. In fact Wadia and his associates had been enjoying the support and esteem from all Labour Unions for their sincere and selfless labour work.

This kind of service to labour continued at Coimbatore when V.O.C. shifted to Coimbatore. There he was privileged to have the friendship and co-operation of many stalwarts like the Tamil savant C.K. Subrahmanya Mudaliar, K. Ramayya Gounder, who was interned for having helped V.O.C. in jail, R.K. Shanmukham Chettiar, Home Rule Movement leader M.S. Ramaswamy Ayyangar, Tamil scholar C.S. Ramachandran Chettiar, the father of Tamil Nadu Co-operation Movement, T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar and others. Their friendship resulted in the formation of an institution in *Coimbatore Labourers' Bank and Stores*. This organization offered credit to the labourers and sold articles at a cheaper rate or at a low profit basis to the members who thereby got immense benefit. With the efforts of V.O.C. the organization functioned well.

This service was taken note of and praised by a veteran nationalist Satyamurti—“Labour workers must organize Banks and Provident Funds and stores for the retail sales of articles of necessity to business propositions as my friends Messrs. N.S. Ramaswamy Ayyangar and V.O. Chidambaram Pillai have

shown by their splendid work in Coimbatore among the labourers.”*

With the Home Rule Movement

Chidambaram Pillai took part in the Home Rule Movement of Bala Gangadhar Tilak and not that of Annie Besant. Her Movement—i.e. ‘Home Rule League’ was formed on 12 September 1916 and that of Tilak on 23 May 1916. Chidambaram took active interest in that Movement of Tilak in propagating its principles in Tamil Nadu. For that service Tilak was paying him fifty rupees per month. As a part of the propaganda, Chidambaram brought out a small pamphlet in Tamil containing the chief aspects of the Home Rule Movement of Tilak, and also rules and regulations regarding the Tamil Nadu Chapter of the same. Siva too joined Chidambaram in those activities.

Even while Bala Gangadhar Tilak and Annie Besant came to a compromise as regards their view points about the “Home Rule League”, still Chidambaram was not prepared to stop his animosity towards her. At a meeting held at Salem on 20 February 1920, he chastised Annie Besant as the British agent and exhorted people not to believe since it would lead to dangerous consequences.

In fact the opposition towards Annie Besant started in Tamil Nadu since 1908. She opposed vigorously the ‘extremist’ policy of Aurobindo Ghosh and for that cause V.O.C. and Subrahmanya Siva criticised her mercilessly. Even Subrahmanya Bharati expressed his displeasure and remonstrance towards Annie Besant in the satirical work “The Fox with the Golden Tail.” In this metaphorical expression “the Fox” indicated Annie Besant and the “Golden Tail” represented the Theosophical Society. The criticism and vituperative opposition appeared in the articles of *The India* of Bharati. Chidambaram and Siva never gave up their first world war hatred towards Besant till the last.

It was the time when the first world war was in progress and the British administration desired to recruit Indian soldiers with the support of all political parties in India. In that connection what

* S. Satyamurthi—The future of Labour Movement in India—*The Swadharma*—1921 p. 466. This journal was the first ever labour weekly in India from Madras. Its editor was E.L. Aiyer.

were the views of V.O. Chidambaram and Subrahmanya Siva were expressed in a letter of L. Davidson, the acting Secretary for Home.

“V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Subrahmanya Siva took further part in public life. The former... publicly advocated the demand of declaration regarding self-government as a preliminary to any enthusiastic co-operation in the matter of recent war. The latter held two Home-Rule meetings in the Salem District in the course of which suggestion was made that the recruitment should depend on a promise of Home Rule.” Thus for Chidambaram every effort was only towards Swaraj or Self Rule for India. He opposed Annie Besant because of her origin and that prejudice did not leave him, in spite of her good work for the cause of Indian freedom. Even when Chidambaram was vehemently criticizing her, Thiru Vi. Ka. supported her and her views through articles in his Tamil journal *Desa Bhaktan*.

On 17 December 1919 Tilak was met by Chidambaram at Perambur (Madras) along with Thiru Vi.Ka. and Subbaraya Kamath—Secretary, *Desa Bhaktan* Limited. Then Chidambaram expressed his displeasure against the support and co-operation given to her by his mentor Tilak.

About that Kalyanasundaram wrote in his life sketches: “The sole-leader of South India addressed Tilak as—‘I have taken you as my leader and follow your footprints. Now I have to restrain myself and withdraw, the reason being that you are interested in the Home Rule Movement of Annie Besant. I have no faith in that lady. In my opinion, she has inferred that an upheaval might emerge during the war period and that might be a hindrance to the British administration and so she had started her movements to side track us. I am sure the country had been duped. Her arrest and internment at Ooty for three months is a mere eye-wash. She is pro-British. I am terribly upset that you are co-operating with her.’”

To that accusation of Chidambaram, Tilak gave a suitable reply point by point to all the charges of Chidambaram, which also had been recorded by Kalyanasundaram. Tilak said: “I do not concern myself with any particular individual. Whoever helps for the freedom of my country, I support readily him or her in that endeavour. In fact I deem it as my first duty... What is in her heart,

only God knows. But this much is a practical experience and a fact. By her activities, there is an increased awareness and longing for freedom of the country. I want that much alone. You consider her activities as hypocritical and the internment an eye-wash. If this kind of hypocritical action could engender this kind of mammoth awakening among our people then if you with all sincerity propagate the principles then how much the people will benefit. Why do you shy away and keep off this active politics? To tell you the truth, I did really wait and observe whether there is any benefit or disadvantage because of her Movement. I found it very productive and advantageous and hence I co-operate with her and side her. If tomorrow I find different and undesirable turn in the events, then at that moment itself I shall withdraw and stop my help and support to her."

This clear and unambiguous explanation of Tilak did not convince Chidambaram regarding his attitude to Annie Besant.

The events smoothly glided into the era when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi entered into the political arena of India.

IX

In the Gandhi Era

THERE WAS AGAIN a turn in the course of Indian National Congress in the year 1919. A new leader emerged and the hitherto sectarian fight for freedom got infused with a spiritual force too with the introduction of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi into the political arena of India. This coincided with a new turn of events in the world political atmosphere also. The October revolution that took place in Russia in October 1917 had really infused a fear in the hearts of colonial imperialists. Lest such a thing should repeat in India too, the British parliament had promulgated the Montagu-Chelmsford accord on 12 July 1918 favouring the sharing of administrative responsibilities in India to a limited extent.

The Bombay Congress held in August-September 1918 refused to accept the award of the M.C. Accord. As a result, the moderates in the Congress Organisation quit the organisation and formed the Indian Liberal Party.

The Jalianwalabagh Massacre took place on 13 April 1918 under the command of General Dyre. Gandhi's success in his Satyagraha method at South Africa was considered an equal and capable return for the guns of the British Imperialists. The twin-principle of *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* had to be spread to all the people of India so that a moral force could be built against a brute physical force of machinery. In that Gandhi became an unparalleled leader to show the way and guide the nation in totally a different path from that which was pursued earlier. With the acceptance of Gandhi as a National Leader, a new era started for the political atmosphere in India.

The Amritasaras (Amritsar) Congress held in December 1919 heralded the new chapter. That was the thirty-fourth Annual Session of the Congress which began in 1885. Leaders like Tilak, M.K. Gandhi, Annie Besant, Ali Brothers, C.R. Dass, M.A.

Jinnah, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru and others participated. From Tamil Nadu, Salem C. Vijayaraghavachari, C.P. Ramaswami Ayyar, Kasturi Ranga Ayyangar, A. Rangaswami Ayyangar, S. Satyamurthi and others went. Motilal Nehru presided over the Congress. As V.O. Chidambaram could not afford the travel expenses, he at first did not go, but N. Dandapani Pillai saw to it that V.O.C. and E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker attended the session at Amritsar. As soon as Chidambaram reached Poona, he was recognised by the followers of Tilak and arrangements were made to travel comfortably in first Class from there instead of the third class in which he was travelling till then.

There is no indication that V.O.C. spoke in the Amritsar Congress. Tilak proposed that they could accept the accord and agitate for more relaxations but Gandhi spoke vehemently against the acceptance of the accord and recommended the rejection of the award. That speech of Gandhi got many more admirers towards him and Nehru in his autobiography had recorded that in spite of the participation of Bala Gangadhar Tilak who was a giant among the politicians, cries of “Gandhiji ki jai”—Hail Gandhi—were heard both inside and outside the arena where the session was held. The stand of the people was a blow to the popularity of Annie Besant too who also pleaded for the acceptance of the award. Chidambaram accepted the anti-Rowlett action and *Satyagraha* but did not favour *Ahimsa* of Gandhi.

When Annie Besant returned to Madras from Amritsar, Thiru Vi. Ka arranged for a reception at the station and a procession. But Chidambaram did not approve that proposal. However the reception and the procession were held under the auspices of Labour Union if not under the Congress aegis. As a consequence protest meetings with hand bills distribution were held.

On 11 January 1920 the procession and reception were held. Gooty Kesava Pillai presided and Kalyanasundaram proposed the vote of thanks. On the same day evening a protest meeting was held in the Triplicane Beach in which Chidambaram spoke. Thiru Vi. Ka had recorded in his Life anecdotes. “He lauded Annie Besant and me, How? With abuses. All the expressions were collected by the reporters and presented to me. I saw the conveyance of Besant in front of the office of *Desabhaktan*. I ran

to meet her. She asked me to get upon the vehicle. She asked me whether I had come across the news regarding the Beach meeting. I replied her in the positive. She said—such things I shall bear as I was trained by Bradlaw.”

Annie Besant neither opposed the Rowlett Act nor accepted the *Satyagraha* of Gandhi. But Thiru Vi. Ka. accepted both the contentions of Gandhi, Chidambaram had already opposed the Rowlett Act even before he went to the Amritsar Congress. On 12 February 1919, a meeting was organised by Siva in Madras in which Chidambaram spoke. Nearly 4000 people attended the meeting, according to Madras fortnightly report. “At that meeting Chidambaram Pillai stressed that it was the tyranny, high-handedness, injustice, and cruelty of the British that provoked conspiracies against it. He further said that the only course left for those who were opposed, was to run away from the country or to get out of the way of the Government or to get rid of the Government.”

Thus the governmental records speak regarding his speech. Again on 16 March 1919, a meeting was held in the Madras Beach under the aegis of the Indian Home Rule League with Ranganath Naidu in the chair. It was a protest meeting against the Rowlett Act. Siva arranged for the meeting in which M.N. Subrahmanya Iyer, Hanumantha Rao, Dandapani Pillai, Bhasyam Ayyengar, Adinarayana Chetti, Subrahmanya Siva and Chidambaram Pillai spoke. They all advocated passive resistance and exhorted the audience to follow the lead of Gandhi.

Chidambaram Pillai said that jail life was preferable and that they need not be afraid of going to jail. He also assured them that by adopting passive resistance, they could not only get the Rowlett Bill repealed but also attain Swaraj.

On 17 March 1919, under the auspices of Anti-Rowlett Act Committee, a meeting was held under the Chairmanship of Kasturi Ranga Ayyangar. In this meeting M.K. Gandhi also participated. After Gandhi's speech, George Joseph of Madura spoke in English, Chidambaram Pillai in Tamil and Hari Sarvothama Rao in Telugu against the Act. T.V. Gopalaswami Mudaliar proposed the vote of thanks to the participants.

The salient point of note in this meeting was Gandhi and

Chidambaram addressed the audience on the same platform one after another.

Even before Gandhi came on his All India Tour to study the situation, meetings were held against the Rowlett Act. At a meeting held to stress the need for accepting the Satyagraha Principle enunciated by Gandhi and also to take vows to stand by that, Chidambaram spoke as follows: "The Westerners were adept in increasing the brute physical force. In a battle between, the physical force and spiritual force, it is certain that the latter force shall become triumphant. This is most opportune moment to find out who are the true patriots of the land. This is the time when the whole of India should rally round Gandhi to undertake the passive resistance. If everyone of us has faith in this *Satyagraha* and follow it up, it shall certainly help us get Swaraj. (*Gandhi in Tamil Nadu*—A. Ramaswamy)

Chidambaram's speech was reported in *The Hindu* of 10 March. One can note that while Tilak was alive—he passed away in 1920—Chidambaram had reconciled himself to the new leadership of Gandhi as a beacon light to the dawn of Indian Freedom. In fact G.A. Natesan a close friend of Gandhi who helped him much in the South African Struggle, opposed the *Satyagraha* Principle. He was criticised by S. Satyamurthi, Kasturi Ranga Ayyangar and V.O.C. had not only accepted the *Satyagraha* Principle but exhorted others too to do the same. In this context a Government report is as follows—"At a meeting at Tuticorin on 28 April 1920 V.O.C. said to the audience; 'You should not think that you could win Swaraj without going to jail. If we have Swaraj you will all live in storeyed houses and I will be like a King.....If you want to entertain self-government, you cannot have it in a peaceful way. It could have to be so. You need not do any other thing to attain this.....Take up the '*Satyagraha* view'....."

In this connection, the view of the Advocate General was sought to advice the government for the possibility of criminal prosecution under 124-A of I.P.C. However the Advocate General replied on 31 May 1920 that "there is nothing in the mode advocated by him which is necessarily seditious."

Chidambaram interested himself even in the "Khilafat Movement" enunciated by Gandhi. On 19 March 1920 in the

Triplicane Beach, the 'Khilafat Day' was celebrated. Thiru Vi. Ka, presided over the meeting. Moulvi Ziauddin Muhammed Sahib, Khan Bahadur Abdul Khudus Padusha Sahib, C. A. Abdul Hakim Sahib, Hari Sarvothama Rao, A. Rangaswamy Ayyangar, Kasturi Ranga Ayyangar, T. Adinarayan Chetti, T.V. Venkatarama Iyer, P. Rangayya, Dr. Subbarayan, Dr. Nanjunda Rao and Sister Balambal spoke. Chidambaram too participated in the meeting and while speaking he touched upon the sensitive parts of the body politics of the Government which usually made them develop cold feet.

Ever since the Russian revolution of 1917 succeeded and gave a fillip to the proletariat, the British imperialists were apprehensive of such developments in India too. Chidambaram remained the audience of the success of the revolution and mentioned the achievement of the Bolshevik-soldiers. The Government records speak in this context—"He pointed out that the Bolsheviks were advancing everywhere and should they enter India, the Hindus and Muhammadans would not give men and money as they did during the war, if the issue was decided against Turks."

In fact it was a time when "Bolshevism" was looked at with respect and many nationalist leaders have hailed the Movement.

In spite of Chidambaram's public utterance regarding "Passive resistance" yet one can understand that he was not fully agreeing with the principle and that uncertainty was indicated through a report of the *Swadesamitran* of 17.8.1920.

On 15 August 1920 the Madras Presidency Congress Committee met under the presidency of Kasturiranga Ayyangar and discussed for four hours regarding the acceptance of the non-co-operation principle of Gandhi. At last it accepted the idea in principle and decided to meet again to discuss about the details. At that meeting Chidambaram spoke, as narrated by A. Ramaswamy in his *Gandhi in Tamil Nadu*, "My main idea and motive is to instil fearlessness and fortitude in our people. If we adopt the 'non-co-operation', it shall definitely render them into cowards. However, since the committee had decided in its favour I abide by the Committee's decision."

When a special session of the Congress was held at Calcutta to decide the fate of Gandhi's idea of "non-co-operation",

Chidambaram took a bold decision not to support it and worked hard to gather support to oppose it. Unfortunately a month before the session on August 1, Tilak passed away. In spite of the charisma of Gandhi, the proposal was not without opposition. Of course, C. Rajagopalachari from Madras endorsed it fully and rose to become the lieutenant of Gandhi in the South. S. Satyamurthi stood by C.R. Das and voted for entering into the Assembly. Hence he too opposed the non-co-operation motion. Annie Besant was totally against the very idea of non-co-operation and as she criticised the *Ahimsa* Policy too, her political sheen faded out slowly.

Namakkal poet Ramalingam Pillai records about Chidambaram's conviction regarding the utility of non-co-operation principle and *Ahimsa*. The poet went along with Chidambaram and the latter was trying to convince all Tamil Nadu delegates to stand against the proposition of Gandhi.

The poet said: "Chidambaram had no faith in the *Ahimsa* principle. In winning over an enemy there is no mercy point or morality. If war had begun then there is no room for righteousness or otherwise or for patient deliberations. According to him, the cause for starting a war must be good and convincing. If it was found to be just then the discussion about the modes of warfare is utter cowardice. This idea was his sincere conviction."

In the Calcutta Congress, Joseph Baptiste—disciple of Tilak—spoke and Chidambaram had no chance to speak. Joseph said, "Tilak supported the co-operation idea at the Amritsar Congress. Being a disciple of his, I stand by his advice. We should not keep away from Assemblies but send competent men there as Tilak desired." C.R. Das, Bipin Chandra Pal, Chaman Lal, Annie Besant, Satyamurthi, Jinnah, Lala Lajpat Rai and others spoke against the proposition of Gandhi. In spite of that 1586 votes were favouring the proposal and only 846 were against it. Out of the delegates who went from Madras 161 were for the proposal and 145 opposed it.

The Calcutta Congress gave a definite verdict for the leadership of Gandhi who became 'Mahatma' before a year ago being conferred such a title by no less a person than Rabindranath Tagore just before the Amritsar Congress.

Namakkal poet in his article wrote—"Chidambaram lost faith in the leadership of Gandhi and found himself that he was not equal to contend the ever increasing importance of Gandhi."

On 4 August 1920 a condolence meeting was held in Madras on the demise of Lokmanya Bala Gangadhar Tilak in which Kasturi Ranga Ayyangar read the condolence resolution. Seconding the resolution, Chidambaram spoke, "I stand as an orphan having lost my political guru and mentor. Tilak did not desire to obtain self-government through non-co-operation but advised to use every legitimate weapon he might possess to obtain the same. He pleaded that we must stand by the lead given by Tilak and obtain the Swaraj."

Chidambaram announced that he had withdrawn from the Congress after his return from the Calcutta session. No doubt he could have left the organisation only with a heavy heart. The status he had in the Congress was something spectacular. He loved the organisation more than anything else. In fact he was sentenced to undergo two life sentences because he was a Congressite. But when he found that he was just like a rudderless ship in a stormy sea without even his mentor Tilak, he decided to quit the Congress finding that he was unsuited and unsuitable to the occasion without a mind to reconcile himself to the new emerging situations.

Regarding the Calcutta Congress session, Subrahmanya Siva who accompanied Chidambaram Pillai, wrote to his friend Chinna Muthu Mudaliar on 13 September 1920. A Part of it—"I returned from Calcutta yesterday. The Congress conference ended in a way. Gandhi acted in his own way setting aside the advice of seasoned politicians. The Mohammadans followed him in a blindfolded manner. Gandhi has corrupted the Congress." Siva took active interest in the Swarajya Party of C.R. Das.

In March 1921 Chidambaram spoke at Coimbatore on the Moplah Rebellion in Kerala as a sequence of Khilafat Movement. For that V.O.C. was prosecuted under section 108 Cr. P.C. for the seditious speech and was bound over furnishing a personal security. After this Chidambaram kept himself off the political affairs.

It is pertinent in this context to recall the personal

correspondence Chidambaram had with Gandhi in which he expressed his personal contact with him and mentioned his pecuniary condition.

When Gandhi returned from South Africa in 1915, he was requested to take along with him the sum collected from among the Tamilians there to help the family of Chidambaram by T. Vediappa Pillai. The amount did not reach the destination in time, when Vediappa Pillai came to India and enquired Chidambaram about the assistance, then only he came to know of it. After that he wrote to Gandhiji to his Ahmedabad address from his Mylapore residence (Paripurna Vinayakar Koil Street). The letter was dated 15 May 1915 and a part of it...“I have already told you in person that I and my family are supported for the past one year or so, by some African Indians. Now too I have applied to them for pecuniary help. Such being the case, there is no reason why I should say that the money intended for me and that is ready to be given to me is not wanted by me. Under my present circumstances if I refuse the money I will be committing a wrong to myself and to my family.”

It is amazing that the correspondence between V.O.C. and Gandhi, which is deposited in the Tamil Nadu Gandhi Centre is not finding a place in the complete works of Gandhi.

It was at that moment Chidambaram wanted to restart his practice and for that he tried to get back the Sannad. It was Hon. Justice Wallace E.H. who restored the Sannad out of compassion and in recognition of that gesture, Chidambaram even named his son who was born after the restoration of Sannad as—Valisvaran. Chidambaram went to Koilpatti to start practice and after some time returned to Tuticorin. After a lapse of seven years, Chidambaram rejoined the Congress. In the provincial conference of the Congress held at Salem in 1927, he presided and in the course of his speech, he touched upon his re-entry into the Congress.

“I decided to re-enter the Congress because it has once again attained the same state as it was before the Calcutta Special Conference especially after the exit of those methods like boycott of Courts, universities and cabinets which were against my principle. For the past several years I who had resigned, was thinking as to how I could come back again. Just, a friend in need is

a friend indeed, those of you who are my friends ordered me at the right time to preside over the Conference. You thus helped me at the right time. I cannot forget what a barrister abusively said of me. He said, "When the people are fighting against the Government to regain the Nation's freedom by peaceful means, you run away without the least positive spirit in you?" I cannot also forget what a journalist wrote to me. He said that "Chidambaram has accepted a bribe from the Government betraying his own country: Patriotism can only grow day after day and never decreases, nor will it perish. Just as darkness cannot prevail when there is light, the gloom of treachery cannot be present when there is brightness to patriotic spirit. May you know this truth—I am very happy that the good days have come when people talk high of me as the disciple of Tilak."

Though there were not many opportunities open to him to participate fully in the activities of National Congress, yet he was doing his bit in a different angle. He was appearing on behalf of the patriots who were arrested and put in jail or against whom cases were framed or alleged, without receiving even any fees. He considered that as a 'duty' cast on him.

In 1930, when A. Masilamani Pillai of Tuticorin participated in the 'Salt Satyagraha' and was jailed Chidambaram took up his case and wrote a letter to him on July 9 1930 in that connection. The letter revealed the zeal and zest of Chidambaram in the National Movement:

"I consider it my mission to expose to the world, the tomfoolery that lies beneath every case which the Government had brought on every patriot."

S.N. Somayajulu who knew Chidambaram well and who had the benefit of his counsel has to say regarding Chidambaram as follows:

"Once at a meeting held at Tuticorin, M.S. Subrahmanya Iyer, Velur Kuppaswamy Mudaliar, Panruti Deivanayagayya, Chidambaram Nainiyappa Pillai and others spoke. They were charged under Sec. 108 of the Cr. P.C.—as sedition. The case was heard in the Sub. Divisional Magistrate of Koilpatti. Then Chidambaram appeared on behalf of the accused. Then Kamaraj, Virudhunagar Muthuswami and myself (Somayajulu) helped in

the conduct of the case. Chidambaram's array of questions on the prosecution side was such that at last it was decided that they could be let on bail. However they were sentenced and sent to jail. When they were conducted to the vehicle for being taken to the jail, the tears that rolled down the eyes of Chidambaram, is still a fresh memory to me."

Again in 1931, when they observed *hartal* in front of toddy shops at Koilpatti, many including Somayajulu were arrested. Once again Chidambaram was the advocate. At the court the accused were asked to stand. Chidambaram refused to take his seat until the charged ones were allowed to sit. The Deputy Superintendent of Police was interrogated by Chidambaram for three full days in that connection. Till then the accused were seated but the official was in the witness box all the while standing answering the barrage of questions by Chidambaram.

Though Chidambaram did not see eye to eye with all the policies of M.K. Gandhi, yet he was aware of his popularity with the people of India and considered Gandhi's leadership necessary at that time.

In 1933 Mahatma Gandhi was on 21 days fast on the Harijan Temple Entry question. Chidambaram became concerned about the health of Gandhi and said agitatedly to M.C. Veerabahu a prominent Congress leader at Tuticorin: "Brother, the life of Mahatma must be saved at any cost. You collect the signatures of the town people to open the temples to Harijans, and I shall sign first in the list."

In 1934 Mahatma Gandhi was on a visit to Tuticorin too on his sojourn of the South. At the presidency of Chidambaram a meeting was organised to make arrangements for the reception to the honoured visitor and also to acquaint the people with the importance of the occasion on 10 December 1933. On that occasion, Chidambaram said: "Due to the immense good work or *punya* and penance of the people of this locality, Mahatma is to visit this place. After having had the *darsan* of such a personality people must shed all their ill-conceived and foolish beliefs and drive out the demon of untouchability."

Of the many strategies that the British adopted to retain themselves in power under the broad policy of 'divide and rule' was the schism created between the citizens of India was on

communal lines. In the North it took the shape of Hindus versus Muslims and in the South and in particular in Tamil Nadu it was Brahmins versus non-Brahmins. As the ill-luck would have it, this legacy gained much currency and utility amongst the present day politicians too in spite of their own loud proclaims on platforms to eschew communalism and casteism.

When Gandhi toured in South India he was asked about this question of Brahmin vis-a-vis non-Brahmin. Of course the Indian National Congress never stood for this view of petty and narrow outlooks. Even now it professes thus even though the profession is honoured more in breaches than in practice. The non-Brahmin lobby later called itself as "Justice Party."

The non-Brahmin lobby which started in 1917 became a powerful one with the involvement and active support of P. Thiagaraya Chetti, T.M. Nair and other influential personalities. Gandhiji was asked at one time by Justice Party leaders Sir A.T. Pannirselvam and T.V. Umamaheswaran Pionner Pillai to effect a compromise between the two factions of Tamil Nadu and of the society to concede the demands of the non-Brahmins and his reply was that it would be in the larger interests of the society to concede the demands of the non-Brahmins and the demand itself arose because of loss of faith among non-Brahmins towards the Brahmins particularly in the case of Government jobs. Similar was the reply of Rajaji too in 1926 regarding the Brahmins non-Brahmins issue. It was chiefly because of seeking jobs in Governments and the chance to have them, envy was planted in the minds of non-Brahmins against Brahmins. In olden days Brahmins never crossed swords with others in their avocations. Why should the present generation being descendants of such illustrious persons fight for jobs along with non-Brahmins?

The Justice Party was out and out a support to the Government and worked against the interests of Swadeshi Party. In order to arrest the influence of the Justice Party amongst the people, an organisation by name "Madras Presidency Association" was formed. This was formulated by the non-Brahmins themselves who were not against the Swadeshi principles of the Congress. In fact it aimed particularly to rebut the advantage that the British Government might obtain because of the non-Brahmin faction, Thiru Vi. Ka. one of the organisers of the party said that only to

bring a death-knell to the Justice Party, Madras Presidency Association had its birth.

The formation of the Association took place in 1917, explaining the salient features and objectives of the newly formed Association, Thiru Vi. Ka. a founder member said. "Without being antagonistic to the Congress principles, this Association will work for the welfare of the Non-Brahmins of Tamil Nadu. Diwan Bahadur Kesava Pillai was the President, Govinda Dass, Salla Guruswami Chetti, E. V. Ramaswami Naicker, Nagai Pakkiriswamy Pillai, Sirgazhi Chidambaranatha Mudaliar, Tanjore Srinivasa Pillai, Madurai George Joseph became the Vice-Presidents; T.V. Gopalaswami Mudaliar, Guruswami Naidu, Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu, Chakkarai Chettiar and Tiru-vi-ka. were secretaries."

In 1919 the second annual conference of the Association was held at Erode. At that time a resolution was passed so as to effect a recall of the Lord Chelmsford. Chidambaram Pillai took part in that conference but whether he spoke or attended only as an observer is not known. But it appears he was an active member of the Association.

In 1920, the twentysixth annual convention of the Madras Presidency Congress was held at Tirunelveli and S. Srinivasa Ayyangar was the President. The main agenda of the meeting was—whether to support Gandhiji's non-co-operation or not. A heated discussion took place and at last it was decided to support Gandhiji's plans.

At that meeting Chidambaram brought forth a resolution regarding job potentialities in the context of Brahmins-non-Brahmins conflict.

"In consideration of the present conditions in the presidency this Conference is of opinion that in the recruitment to the Public Services and the filling up of honorary offices, the Brahmin and non-Brahmin communities shall be adequately represented."

On 21 July 1927, a non-Brahmin conference was held at Coimbatore and in that Chidambaram participated. In the course of the speech, he referred to the conditions of the non-Brahmins, communal representations in Government jobs and also the influence of Brahmins in the Congress. A report as recorded in *The Indian Quarterly Register* of July-December 1927:

“While supporting the resolution, Chidambaram said the non-Brahmins were the originators of the Congress. But now the powers are in the hands of Brahmins. The present move was to get back that power. The Congress had among its members eminent patriots (non-Brahmins) working hard for self-government. Should the non-Brahmins of the Justice Party, sit in deliberations with those eminent non-Brahmins and work for the attainment of Swaraj, the Congress could not get away from the idea of communal representation so long as various classes and communities existed in India, without any hesitation they should all join the Congress.”

It is thousand pities that such an eminent patriot like Chidambaram should make a mistake like this. He must be aware that indomitable men like G. Subrahmanya Ayyar, Mahakavi Subrahmanya Bharati were in the forefront in evoking the political consciousness and awareness of patriotism before anybody else in the south could think about it. In fact his two sides on political platforms were Brahmins—Siva and Padmanabha Iyyengar. What could have passed in his mind when he articulated such expressions of “non-Brahmins were originators of freedom struggle in the south” and “now the powers are in the hands of Brahmins”, is not easy to divine.

In the deliberations of the Conference eminent men like R.K. Shanmugham Chetti, Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu, Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundaram, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, Surendrenath Arya, A. Ramaswamy Mudaliar and others took active interest. A rare outcome of this conference was many joined Congress.

The speech gave an impression among the public that Chidambaram was gliding towards the Justice Party and few thought that Chidambaram by espousing the cause of communal representation was turning against the Brahmins. These hypotheses were only presumptuous and non-realities. In fact the idea of having to get a Government order for the communal representation was mooted in the first ever Congress Ministry at Madras headed by Rajaji, and the order was effected not by the Justice Party Ministry but an independent Ministry headed by Dr. P. Subbaroyan.

M.P. Sivagnanam who has espoused the cause of Chidambaram Pillai's services in the nation, has to say this:

“The Justice Party which was then the sixth party, tried to rope in V.O.C. But Mr. Pillai whose only aim was Swarajya, refused to join the party which maintained caste differences. He was greatly interested in improving the conditions of the non-Brahmins. He was immensely sorry that most non-Brahmins were backward in several fields. He has many a time expressed this thought in his speeches. But he did not approve of a political movement on the basis of Brahmin and non-Brahmin caste differences.”

M.P. Sivagnanam is perhaps right in his assessment of the situation. The object condition in which many of the non-Brahmin community were placed could have moved him to such an extent that only by taking over of the controlling power of the Congress, steps could be effectively implemented to better the situation. It is true due to their knowledge of English, many a Brahmin could occupy places of authority in the Government under the British rule and be in a vantage point. But one factor that every one missed to reckon was that the percentage of well placed Brahmins seemed larger due to the population of Brahmins in Tamil Nadu. Secondly it is being repeatedly ignored that Brahmins were in the vanguard of freedom struggle too when situation warranted.

It is also likely that Chidambaram became an embittered man after his release of jail term. The hardships endured in the jail, the mental agony that his pet scheme of Navigation Company was handed over on a platter, to the very enemies, the indigent circumstances in which he was placed and rendered helpless except to look for benevolent financial help from others, the changed atmosphere in the political field with which he could not compromise—all could have made him despondent and in one of his temporary moments of amnesia, the course of events could not have been seen or recollected by him in the proper perspective. Moreover the heart-rending conditions of the life of non-Brahmins in the face of authoritarian Brahmins, expressed tellingly by previous speakers could have moved him to take brief on their behalf. Otherwise a sane, sober and social minded person—Chidambaram—could not have seen in between the lines and make distinctions on the basis of caste and creed.

Chidambaram fell ill and when Rajendra Prasad visited Tuticorin in 1935, he called on Chidambaram and saw him in his bed. On that evening in the meeting which he addressed he said, “I

am fortunate to come to Tuticorin where Chidambaram Pillai is living. I was one of the many who were aggrieved on hearing that Chidambaram had been sentenced and sent to jail. In fact after hearing his predicaments in the jail, my love for the country and patriotism have increased and intensified.”

During his last days, Chidambaram wished to have his last breath in the Congress office and hence he requested his friend M.C. Veerabahu to shift him to the office.

On 18 November 1936 at 11.30 in the night the great patriot and the valiant fighter of freedom joined his political mentors in their heavenly abode.

The last voyage was rendered colourful with the participation of Congress volunteers. *Swadesamitran* reported about that on 21 November thus:

“The great and unique patriot breathed his last in his house. The news spread in the town instantly. The whole town was plunged in grief. As a mark of respect to the departed leader black flags were hung everywhere. All shops were closed down. As the funeral procession started with the body of the departed leader kept on a decorated and black-flag-wrapped bier, hundreds, of Congress workers walked behind with silence writ large on their faces. National Bhajan was sung, all along the route.

“Before Chidambaram ended up his last minute existence in this world, he desired to hear the song of Bharathiar and Sivagurunathan who took part in many Satyagrahas, sang the song of Bharathiar and it was ‘when the thirst of freedom will be quenched’—a famous song reflecting the longing of the patriots to obtain Swaraj.

“The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee which met on 24 October 1937, passed a resolution that 18 November must be celebrated as V.O.C. Day every year.”

It was customary among the patriots of those days to have equal love and loyalty towards the country and one’s mother tongue. Chidambaram Pillai who had a rich heritage of Tamil scholarship in the family itself tried his hand in different aspects of literary pursuits. His contributions of multi-faceted intellectual pursuits in Tamil language and literature will form the theme of the next chapter.

Service to the Mother Tongue

IT IS COMMON experience everywhere that along with the arousal of nationalistic spirit, there was a concurrent literary flourish or renaissance too. India is no exception to this. In fact the pride over the glory of the ancient culture of this land helped very much the intensification of the spirit of national pride and possessiveness. Newer ideas and experiments in varieties of using the language for compositions increased. The enrichment by way of newer and newer compositions different from the traditional ones both in style and content, more so with the problems of contemporary nature, enabled one and all to have a willing approach to literary exercises and that led for the awakening and arousal of the spirit of nationalism.

Apart from that, the imprisoning of leaders of front-ranking nationalists had considerably helped the cause of literature too. Tilak wrote the most valuable commentary to the Bhagavadgita, *The Gitarahasya* in the Mandalay prison. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote *Discovery of India* in jail.

Chidambaram Pillai had the Tamil tradition coupled with Saivism in his blood itself as a hereditary acquisition. In his younger days he dreamt to become a "writer" and he said, "my dreams to become a writer got fulfilled in my stay in the prison."

That Chidambaram was applauded by traditional scholars of Tamil even in his thirty third year (1905) is evident from a report in *Vivekabhanu* of Madurai in its April issue published in 1905: "Sriman V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, an Advocate of Tuticorin who is very generous to Tamil scholars showing affection like a mother to her son, and who revels in spending much time in research and scholarly pursuits...."

In 1901, the annual conference of Madras Presidency Congress was held at Madurai and at that time Pandithurai Thevar of

Ramanathapuram Samasthanam was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. Being a patron of Tamil scholars, he was always surrounded by Tamil scholars. In the Conference, there were many eminent scholars of Tamil. Taking the opportunity, Thevar aired his views to establish a "Tamil Sangam".

The idea got concrete shape on 14 September 1901 and the "Sangam" as its predecessors of yore was started amidst tumultuous chorus of the "fourth Sangam has been born," and thus became a historic incident.

When Chidambaram was working hard to start a National Steamship Navigation Company, the same Pandithurai Thevar sold a part of his *zamin*—a village by name Pambur for two lakh rupees and gave the money to Mr. Pillai.

We have already noted that the same Thevar had taken Chidambaram as a member of the Sangam and wrote a letter of thanks to Mr. Pillai for his acceptance as a member and it is a well-known fact that he wrote articles in Tamil on Politics and Religion in the journal *Vivekabhanu* from 1902 onwards. "God and Devotion", "Alms-giving", "Caste or Fate", "God is one" are some of the more important topics on which he wrote.

Chidambaram was a versatile scholar in Tamil and his contributions may be put under four broad headings viz. as a poet, as a translator, as a publisher, and as a commentator. Besides he was skilful in editing old classics and substituting emendations wherever he disagreed with the extant text and considered them spurious or interpolated. He adduced reasons for his actions too.

As a poet his compositions were in conventional style of the old school. Though Chidambaram was very progressive in politics, yet regarding composing poems he stuck to the old pattern and never reconciled himself with the contemporary expansions and experiments in the field. As an illustration, Subrahmanya Bharati broke away from the traditional pattern of poem construction and initiated modern poetry which attracted many more youngsters to him and thus paved the way for enrichment of that part of literature in the latter period. But Chidambaram did not write any composition on nationalism or patriotism in spite of his fiery speeches on the platform with all his capacity to compose poems.

His poetic ability may be judged from the two volume “Collection of poems”, his “autobiography” and also “Meyyaram—True Dharma”. The two parts were combined into one and published in 1915. In the introduction to this volume he said: “Out of the three hundred and eighty verses, about one hundred are about “God”, another hundred are about “Discipline” and the rest one hundred and eighty are to deal with information that I have conveyed to my relatives and friends. The last will throw light about my idea and conviction of my religious faith, my prime conviction in life, how I spent my time in prison, among the well wishers and friends of mine and also among relatives whom I like and love most, what benefits I received from them and what benefit I had obtained due to prison-life, etc.”

The special feature of this collection is the dating of the compositions of some of them. He had also invited Pandithurai Thevar who was responsible for the founding of the fourth Tamil Sangam at Tuticorin. In the course of the eulogy-poem, he mentioned “The early Pandyas who were responsible for the three Sangams never worried about the spiritual path and salvation except to serve the Tamil language, and they did not go about to various places preaching. But Pantithurai Thevar has been encouraging the furtherence of Tamil and Saivism together through his lectures wherever he goes.”

It was a time when the mother tongue Tamil and Saiva faith were not treated as mutually complementary. It will be interesting to note what his opinion was regarding the language point as against Sanskrit which is also equally hoary and popular like Tamil. The influence of Sanskrit in all spheres like verbal (word) formulations, imagery, and similar linguistic fields apart from philosophy and religious spheres was in equal force so as to consider Sanskrit and Tamil as two eyes of a person. The controversy regarding the relative merits between Tamil and Sanskrit was acute at that time and after a perusal of his works one has to arrive at a conclusion that Mr. Pillai was not a fad of either language and would like to treat both in their own useful spheres. There are two poems. In one he speaks about the richness of Tamil

language and in another he refers to the existence of all the knowledge in Tamil that is found in Sanskrit.*

As against this in a letter of appreciation to Mahavidwan M. Raghava Ayyangar for his excellent article in the journal *Senthamizh*—an organ of Madurai Tamil Sangam, he had referred to Tamil and Sanskrit as “two gems”. Another Tamil savant who was recipient of Chidambaram Pillai’s encomium in chaste Tamil poems was Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Ayyar—a redoubtable Tamil scholar who relentlessly worked for unearthing the rare manuscripts of the old Sangam classics and published them with remarkable clarity and matchless glossary for recondite words working on which many doctoral theses were prepared.

When G. Subrahmanya Ayyar passed away in May 1916, Chidambaram wrote an elegy of ten verses and paid his homage for his services to the land and to the cause of freedom.

His third published work was *Meyyaram*—True Dharma. This poetical work explains the contents of “Tirukkural” of Tiruvalluvar—a classic of ancient Sangam period containing moral maxims. C. Rajagopalachari who was then an advocate at Salem had the following to say regarding the work—“I value much the work of Chidambaram. The sayings of Kural are being explained in such a fine and simple way with contemporary flavour.”

This book contains 1250 verses arranged in five sections viz. for studentship, householding, politics, Brahmanism and Absolute Reality.

Another work of his is *Meyyarivu*—True Knowledge. This is

* Tamil and Sanskrit had been together even from the Tolkappiam days and the work has a rule for adopting Sanskrit words in Tamil. The percolating Sanskrit has rendered Tamil language a rich and valuable status. However the nationalist Siva expressed an opinion—of course it was generally inspired even before—that the Tamil works must contain only Tamil words and there should not be the usage of other language words. It was the time when English words found entry into the Tamil. So, as a blanket taboo, the nationalist Siva wanted to have pure Tamil usage. But Chidambaram was not a fad and being sober did not find any harm in the presence of Sanskrit words in Tamil writing and however preferred only Tamil words if found available or until such time Tamil words became current and popular.

also poetical composition dealing with discipline and self restraint. The hundred verses of this composition are in venba metre. In its introduction the author says about its genesis, "When I was in the Cannanore jail undergoing imprisonment for sedition, I used to talk to my fellow prisoners regarding the sinful acts and the punishment for them both in this world and also here in after. After hearing me for a considerable number of days, they requested me to compose a few verses regarding the nature of sinful acts and the consequences so that they may memorize them, and get benefited by not committing the same again. It was for them in stages I had to compose one hundred verses in venba metre, which is being brought out in the book form."

As a translator too Chidambaram made his mark. But the position of a translator is unenviable. "Translators are traitors"—declared Tennyson for the simple reason that they may fail more often to bring out the intention of the original author. A person who ventures to translate must have mastery over two languages, i.e. the language in which the translated piece is couched and the language in which the translation is made. The process is of four-fold—mere translation, transcreation, transliteration and free rendering. Translation is a bridge between the source language and the target language and hence it should be true to fact, correct, adaptable and a creation in fact. Chidambaram had been sincere in his endeavour and loyal to the original.

When Subrahmanya Bharati and Subrahmanya Siva translated the works of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, Chidambaram took the works of James Allen for his handiwork. It may be interesting to know that after all James Allen was not even a front-ranking author, yet Chidambaram was fascinated by the works of Allen for the simple reason that the thoughts of religions, spiritualism and personal discipline and other items were similar to those of Indian spiritualism. Allen used to say that "India is the treasure house or nursery of Truth and Wisdom."

Chidambaram believed that one must clearly and in easy manner explain to the people the fundamental or basic truths and discipline for an enlightened life. Helping the people to lead a better life is a worship to God according to him. He has translated the following of Allen into Tamil—"Out of heart," "From poverty to power"—this into two parts—"As the way of Peace and Path to Prosperity" and "As a man thinketh."

While translating, he had not only brought out the intention of the original but also made the point clear by drawing out parallel statements and proverbs of the ancient Tamil literature whenever they agreed in content or echoed the sentiment.

Not stopping with translations from English to Tamil, it appears he had even attempted to translate from Tamil to English. From an introduction to the translation of the English work "As a man thinketh", he notes that he had translated the first part of *Tirukkural* (Arattuppai) into English while he was in jail.

Chidambaram proved himself to be good editor. At that time Tamil scholars like U. Ve. Saminatha Ayyar and C. Vai. Damodaram Pillai took enormous pains to unearth the lost manuscripts of the ancient Sangam classics and other rare works which had gone out of sight and published them being critically edited adding suitable introductions and glossaries for early comprehension. This fever caught Chidambaram Pillai too. In this endeavour he had the benefit of the services of Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai, a great Tamil writer, Selvakasavaraya Mudaliar, Prof. T. Kanakasundaram Pillai, Tamil Poet E.M. Subramanya Pillai and other celebrities.

Tirukkural—the great ancient classic has had many commentaries. Its period is considered to be second century A.D. But the commentators, even earliest of them belong to tenth century A.D. Hence due to the existence of a gap of eight to nine centuries between the work and its commentators, there are a number of chances for the interpolations and corruptions entering into the text itself. The earliest of commentaries on this work are Parimelazhagar, Manakkudavar, Paridi, Paripperumal and Kalingar. Among them Parimelazhagar is considered to be the earliest. But his commentary is not acceptable to all without any controversy. Chidambaram preferred the commentary of Manakkudavar as he thought he was true to the original in his commentary. In 1918, when Chidambaram was having a holiday from active politics, he indulged in the editing and publication of Tamil classics. The first part of *Tirukkural-Arattuppai* was brought out by him with Manakkudavar's commentary. This was the first printed edition of *Tirukkural* with Manakkudavar's commentary.

The earliest grammatical work for the Tamil language is

considered to belong to fifth century B.C. viz. *Tolkappiam*. But it is a unique work in that it has not stopped prescribing rules and exceptions to the language alone, but has had rules and guidelines for the social life and economic aspects too. In 1928, Chidambaram brought out the first fascicule of the first part of *Tolkappiam*. In its introduction he writes: "I had the good fortune to read *Tolkappiam* in 1910 and was enthralled to find the contents which are very useful for life in this world". The first fascicule contained two chapters with Ilampuranar's commentary. The rest seven chapters of the I Part—'Poruladhikaram' was edited by Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai. The editions with both the names—Chidambaram and Vaiyapuri Pillai, were published by Vavilla Ramaswami Sastrula who was a linguist and a keen observer of men and matters being a good nationalist. This Telugu gentleman took a special interest in Chidambaram Pillai's endeavour in bringing out the publication and helped him. Similarly his translations were published with the financial assistance of Salem S. Rajagopalachari, T. Vediappa Pillai and other well wishers.

Tolkappiam contains three parts—Ezhuthu (alphabet), Sol (Sound) and Porul (Sense). Of these three parts, the first and the third parts were brought out by Chidambaram with Ilampuranar's commentary. Before he could do anything about the middle one, Sol, he passed away. There is reason for selecting, the commentary of Ilampuranar amidst others of Nachinarkiniyar, Senavaraiyar, Deivachilayar, and Kalladar for the simple reason that Ilampuranar alone commented upon the whole work whereas others have done only for parts or fragments which were alone available for usage.

One another work brought out by Chidambaram was '*Innilai*' which was misrepresented to him as an ancient one, but turned out to be spurious, which was revealed only after his death. In spite of this Chidambaram stands out as a first rank editor and publisher of ancient classics which act speaks about his zeal and devotion to the mother tongue Tamil and also in retrieving the ancient tradition.

Chidambaram made his mark as a commentator. He originally intended to write commentary on *Tolkappiam* and in fact wrote for a few sections too. Then he came across the ancient

commentary of Ilampuranar and finding that very satisfactory, and catering to his expectations, he gave up the idea of writing his comments on the work. This he notices in his introduction to the book that he published—the first part called ‘Ezhuthu’—alphabet.

The other work that attracted him was *Tirukkural* of Tiruvalluvar. It appears, he told his friend Parali S. Nellaiappar once “One who claims to be a Tamilian must study *Tirukkural* daily. I have no sympathy, regard and love to any one who has not known all the 1330 kurals with the meaning be he a sage, sanyasi, a friend or even my own kith and kin.”

It was his zeal to comment on the whole of the work. First he wrote for the first section of the work—Arratuppal Dharma, a commentary and got that published in 1935. In the introduction to this publication, he wrote: “The rest two parts viz. Portupal—Artha and Inbathuppal—Kama, may each extend to three hundred pages and in the last information and particulars regarding Tiruvalluvar about his caste, time, and genesis of the work apart from the social and other conditions of Tamil Nadu are to be given. Hence it is intended that the three parts should be in three separate volumes.”

One has to recollect that Chidambaram was an unsparing critic and hence the stamp of his original thinking and a courage to steer clear the tradition and consensus of contemporary scholars are evident in the *Tirukkural* publication as well as in the *Sivagnanabodham*—a Sāiva classic.

In the published work, i.e. Aram section there are 380 Kurals—verses. Among them 76 verses become controversial with reference to the commentaries of Parimelazhagar and Chidambaram; for 12 verses Chidambaram refutes the contention of Parimelazhagar through his comments; in five there is complete agreement between the two commentaries and in the rest there is no tangible controversy and in fact acquiescence is evident.

Even among the old commentators there is a difference of opinion regarding the text as well as the meaning of *Tirukkural*. About 151 verses of the original text are in disagreement between Parimelazhagar and Manakkudavar and three other commentators. Chidambaram had adopted 74 verses in the original different

from that of Parimelazhagar and 30 of them are in agreement with rest commentators. However the balance of 44 verses are the emendations of Chidambaram.

Besides Chidambaram had the conviction to differ from the scholarly tradition that the first three chapters—Benediction to God, the excellence of above worlds, and the glory of ancestors—were not of Tiruvalluvar but assigned to him. That this view is not accepted by the scholars is a different question.

Sivagnanabodham Edition

Chidambaram wrote a commentary for this much respected and popular Saiva work which has had a traditional commentary by Sivagnanaswamigal. He boldly declared that the sixth Sutra of the text was an infiltration and hence substitute the same by his own. To vindicate his stand, he wrote an article entitled—“Sivagnanabodham—a rethinking of the sixth Sutra”—in the *Dinamani* issue of 6 December 1935. In that he pointed out that the extant work was a translation of a Sanskrit text of the same name. The text of the Sixth Sutra needed a substitution as it was faulty and did not connote the correct intention. If any one pointed out the flaw in this correction, the author averred that he would retrace his steps and abide by the corrected one provided it was logical, reasonable and justifiable. However the challenge was not honoured by any serious Siddhantin, it appears.

In that connection he wrote a letter to his friend and a great Tamil Scholar Somasundarabharati on 12 December 1935 in which he mentioned, “I had sent an article to *Dinamani*’s annual number supplement, containing my commentary of *Sivagnanabodham*. I had not criticized the views of Sivagnaneswamigal, as it would pain the hearts of many Saivites. But there are many instances where I disagreed with the views of the Swamigal. However some may even abuse me for this as traditionaclast. But I do not mind that. I write what I feel with all reverence to saivism.”

This will clearly bring out the strength of will and courage of conviction the person had with unbending and uncompromising spirit towards charlatans and pseudoscholars.

Though steeped in saiva tradition, he had catholicity of mind. Having had a good grasp of Siddhanta, Vedanta and other

systems of religious faiths and philosophy, he interested himself in writing books on different topics like Saivism, Vaishnavism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Humanity, path to Salvation and the Universal Scripture. This piece of information is found in the introduction to the Tamil work, *Meyyaram*—True Dharma. But neither the manuscripts of these titles nor the printed ones are traceable now.

He was an ardent lover of Tamil language and literature, and that too in its ancient classics. In different disciplines or branches he had enriched the language and thereby proved himself as a great son of Tamil Nadu and a true patriot of India, shining luminously among the galaxy of great national leaders.

XI

Epilogue

INDIA IS A land of spiritualism and the geographical structure helps forming a temperament and attitude like that. From the very ancient times, the concept of 'Dharma' an untranslatable word in any other language, is the guiding principle both in the secular and spiritual matters. Even Tiruvalluvar in his immortal work *Tirukkural* has emphasized the benign considerateness of this concept (Aram) and has had a chapter on it besides the other two norms Porul and Inbam, corresponding to Artha and Kama. In the ancient times, when king erred, the people could challenge him in the name of Dharma and in the secular affairs, even though the monarch was highly merited and respected yet the people had their remonstrances made felt by the ruling monarch. This understanding of "each attending to one's own duties" had its origin only in the concept of Dharma. A moral fear that one should not be derelict from one's own duty was there from the prince to the peasant. This trait is found present in very Indian even today as a characteristic feature of Indian ethos, though it is diluted to a maximum degree in some, due to the vagaries of time and percolation of ideas and customs of exotic origin in the native country.

India which was and has been knit as one unit in matters spiritual was not so in the political sense. Every Indian was considering himself as a 'son' of India and the earth on which he lived was sacred to him. This was the condition till the eleventh century when the Arabs and Muslim rulers of Afghanistan turned their green eye towards the prosperous land of India and from hence a new rulership had started in different parts of India, thus slowly etching the ancient dictum 'Dharma' in its vitals.

However, the whole of India came under a foreign administration from about early eighteenth century. There were sporadic attempts to throw away the foreign yoke in a small measure, the Vellore Mutiny of 1806 and the sepoy Mutiny of

1857 to wit, even though they did not alter the conditions substantially, but got only an apparently conciliatory approach to the ruled in a pacifying manner. In fact these did not touch even the fringes of the cost of arms that the British administration wore on itself so far as general administration was concerned.

A substantial measure was needed to revitalise the Nation with a spirit of nationalism and patriotic fervour with altruistic ends. All India level conferences and meetings were needed to focus the points of resistance and rehabilitation of Swaraj. Surendranath Banerji, Allan Octavian Hume and other annual conventions of Theosophical Society at Adyar, Madras, and activities of other sister institutions paved the way for the healthy development of political awareness and its growth in a systematic manner. The emergence of National Congress under the stewardship of A.O. Hume came to age and realised its responsibilities. As a consequence the status-quoist and the progressivists as otherwise called Moderates and Extremists, sprang into the field.

The extremists took their defiant stand firmly from the Surat Congress of 1907. Tilak, Chidambaram Pillai and Aurobindo Ghosh became the high priests of the activist group called—“Nationalist Party”—for the West, South, and East parts of India to spread the message of freedom to India, simply called ‘Swaraj’.

V.O. Chidambaram Pillai entered into active politics during 1906-1907 even though he was a member of the National Congress from 1898. Joining hands with Bala Gangadhar Tilak as his disciple and loyal follower with a firm conviction in his approach to politics, Mr. Pillai actively spread the message of ‘Vande Mataram’ and ‘Swaraj’ in the Tamil Nadu’s Southern base. For his acts of vigorous patriotism and nationalistic fervour and for the keen interest to placate the Indian honour and glory of the days of old as presented in the ancient works of the land, the British administration gave him a double life sentence in 1908. Within a short period of two years, an ordinary person hailing from the extreme end of India, shot into international eminence. Condemnation and criticism poured in on his being awarded double life sentence, not only from different parts of India but also from outside India; that the sentence was reduced to six years, after persistent appeals to all possible judicial courts and he had had the benefit of remission due to his disciplinary conduct and behaviour is another story. It will be of interest to note that when he

applied for remission under general amnesty during the period, he was denied.

That eminence was no small achievement, and it speaks volumes about the sincerity of purpose and steadfast adherence to the avowed principle undertaken. No doubt he had his own shortfalls which were of negligible character. After return from jail in 1912, he could not study the changed atmosphere and get attuned to the norms of the then demands of time. It does not mean an unsteady character. The human being, being an organic entity, changes or revises his attitudes and behaviour as per the demands of time, without compromising his basic stand and influences similarly minded persons too.

Much water had flown under the bridge by the time Chidambaram could get his release and see around the political scenery. Annie Besant had entered into the political arena. She being of Irish origin had carried in her blood the Irish tendency of opposition to the English on the political plane and hence using her influence here and outside, not only tried to consolidate the political gains that Indians had by that time, but insisted that the past cultural glory and heritage of India must also revive. So she organised the "Home Rule League" on all India basis and brought to the people of India better awareness of Swaraj to them and also their rights and responsibilities as a citizen of India. Notwithstanding the endeavour in the political field, she entrusted herself along with Wadia Arundale and other like-minded persons for labour welfare measures.

Tilak saw through the good intentions of hers and accepted to co-operate with her but Chidambaram could not and would not. He had a suspicious eye on her and considered her as untrustworthy. The cause for this was not far to seek. When Annie Besant vehemently disagreed and criticised the path of extremism of Aurobindo Ghosh and Tilak, Chidambaram, Siva and Bharati he suspected her to be an ally of the British. Bharati reconciled with her political views and acts but not with her Theosophy. But Chidambaram and Siva never got over their feelings about Annie Besant till the last. Thiru Vi. Ka. and others supported her in her activities—labour, political and cultural fields but Chidambaram arranged for condemnation meetings.

Similarly when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi came into the

Indian political scene and became a focal point of attraction for all, Chidambaram could accept him only with reserved feelings. He could not accept or compromise his stand with the creed of 'Non-violence' of Gandhi. Perhaps Chidambaram might be right in his own way.

As Jawaharlal Nehru described the freedom of India as 'Tryst with Destiny', India could have got freedom anyhow. With personalities like Chidambaram Pillai, Subhas Chandra Bose and other national revolutionaries India could have gained or earned her freedom from the foreign yoke a few years before or after. But the price that ought to have been given for that in terms of blood, sweat and labour might have been much more than what had been offered at the altar of freedom that we had got now. However, God's ways are always inscrutable indeed!

One thing must be said to the credit of Chidambaram Pillai. Being a man of versatile tastes and manifold personality with all enviable qualities of head and heart his contribution to the nation's struggle for freedom was remarkably noteworthy. But for him, the South could not have had the pride and privilege to rub shoulders with other all India figures of freedom fighters in the early decades of this century. It is an undeniable fact that Subrahmanya Bharati, Chidambaram Pillai and Subrahmanya Siva have carved a niche for themselves in the Temple of Indian National Congress representing the South just like the three Acharyas from South had brought fame and name to the South in the field of Indian Philosophy in the medieval period.

In the fast moving run of politics, many a change had taken place. The Second World War brought the realisation of freedom to India nearer the point of accomplishment and many a difference was ironed out between the Hindus and Muslims through various meetings of leaders of the two groups. Independence was at last declared on the midnight of 14-15 August 1947, with the partition of India as India and Pakistan.

But one thing must be noticed in the characters of winners of freedom to India, all had a sense of dedication to the espoused cause. A firm conviction in the moral values and ethical standards gave them a confidence which no other external adjunct could have given. To them, this land of Bharat, India was a Devi

personified. The slogan 'Vande Mataram' which had its appeal to all was engendered in the spiritual background of Sakti worship of Bengal. Mahakavi Subrahmanya Bharati and Subrahmanya Siva were great and ardent worshippers of Sakti Ma. Chidambaram Pillai himself was steeped in Saivism and Saiva Siddhanta even though he found equal importance and influence in the Vedanta. To him Siddhanta and Vedanta were very nearly the same leading to a common goal rather two sides of a coin. The point to note in this is, the spring of his conviction was the religious faith.

In the world of political developments Chidambaram Pillai's services to the nation were very nearly forgotten. The services he had done to the country, the sacrifices he had made for the sake of his avowed principle of Swaraj, the sufferings he had undergone in this behalf and the tranquil equanimity he had borne on his countenance in the face of all turmoils, are such that no one worth his name as a Tamilian should ignore much less forget. But public memory being notoriously short and not sharp, it did happen to him.

Thanks to heavens, another member of the same tribe of patriots, who also had his share of service to the country, by entering into jails for struggle for freedom—M.P. Sivagnanam, endearingly called Ma. Po. Si. had taken on his shoulders the responsibility of making the people of Tamil Nadu remember the services and sacrifices of Chidambaram Pillai. Ma.Po. Si. was in the Congress for a long time and few years after independence started his own party of "Tamilarasu Kazhagam". Yet from platforms of both the parties, he very nearly led a Movement for the memory of Chidambaram Pillai. He organised memorial meetings on his birthdays as well as the day of his demise and as a consequence memorials were erected in different places of Chidambaram Pillai's contact.

As a memento to the leader nonvareil a ship by name *S.S. Chidambaram* now floats in the waters of Indian Ocean sailing towards eastern countries under the auspices of the Government of India. In 1986, the Tamil Nadu Government divided the erstwhile Tinnevely district and carved out the Chidambaranar District which includes the places of his birth and political activity to honour him and also to perpetuate his memory.

Chidambaram Pillai strode on the Indian soil like a Colossus and no one can pay him rich enough tribute that commensurate with his suffering and sacrifice.

Appendix I

VOC's Letter to Gandhi

to G. Chidambaram Esq.
 20. 26. 14

309

Englishes, dated 20
 2nd May 1915.

Dr. H. Gandhi Esquire.

Bar. at. Law,

Dr. 6192 no on

Admadedad

Dear Sir, Dr. 92 no on

Many thanks for your kind letter of the
 20th instant. I thought from your letter of the
 21st ultimo that the money given to you to be
 permitted to me was spent towards the same purpose
 cause of South Africa and that you would so pay me
 from your own pocket, which I thought would not
 be possible. So I am sure to you that you need not trouble
 yourself any more about it. But now your letter of
 the 20th instant makes me understand that the
 money was not used for any other cause and that
 it is still with you for disposal. I wish, in my
 present condition, be only glad to receive that
 money from you with my thanks to yourself, your
 good friends and to all those that have helped it.
 I have already told you in person that I and my
 family are supported for the past two years or so
 by some ^{South} African Indians. I am sure I am
 entitled to them for payment, half. But only
 the fact that there is no reason why I should say that
 the money is intended for me and that money is to be
 given to me is not what I want. I want my

2 310 6192

present circumstances if I require that amount, it is
be committing a wrong to myself and my family,
So I request you will be kindly pleased to send me
the money to the following address of mine at your
convenience and also to let me know the address
of your friend that you sent the money to that
may send him and, through him, the subscribers
of the amount my family participate as a sign
of my gratitude to them. Some of my friends
think if they could join your Institution. I shall
show them your letter of the 20th instance and then
write to you what they say. Hoping this will find
you and Mrs. Gandhi in good health,

Yours sincerely,
Col. H. D. D. D.

My address,

40, Gopipura and Kriyagatah Road, Bangalore,
India.

Appendix II

The Struggle in Madras

THE NEW SPIRIT of spiritual and political regeneration which is today becoming the passion of the country, has arrived at a crisis of its destinies. All movements are exposed to persecution, because the powers that be are afraid of the consequences which may result from their sudden success and cannot shake off the delusion that they have the strength to suppress them. When Kamsa heard that Krishna was to be born to slay him, he tried to prevent the fulfilment of God's will by killing His instrument, as if the power which warned him of approaching doom had not the strength to enforce the doom. So too, when the vague prophecies of a Messiah reached the ears of Herod and he heard that Christ was born in Bethlehem, the fear of his earthly dominion passing into the hands of another drove him to massacre all the children of the Jews in order to avoid his fancied doom. These examples are a parable of the eternal blindness of men when face to face with movements divinely inspired which threaten or seem to threaten their temporal dominion. The bureaucracy are here to be replaced when their work is over, and if they had been able to put aside their selfish interests, and were really capable of governing India and India's interests as they have so long professed, they would have recognised in the upheaval of 1905 the signal of their approaching dismissal from their task, and made the way smooth for a peaceful transference of power to the people, thus securing a glorious euthanasia which would have been remembered in history as a unique example of self-denial and far-seeing statesmanship. But human nature is too feeble to arise to such heights of wisdom and self-abnegation, except in those rare instances when the divine breath enters into a nation and lifts it to a pitch of enthusiasm which ordinary human weakness cannot support.

The persecution of Swadeshism which is now reaching the most shameless lengths in Madras, is a sure sign that God has withdrawn Himself from the British bureaucracy and intends

their rapid fall. Injustice is an invitation to death and prepares His advent. The moment the desire to do justice disappears from a ruling class, the moment it ceases even to respect the show of justice, from that moment its days are numbered. The cynical disregard of all decorum with which the shows of law are being used to crush the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company in Tuticorin will exasperate the whole of the mercantile community in the country. It will convince those who still dream that industrial development is possible without political power, of their mistake. The Marwaris are already alienated, the whole Jain community seething with an indignation too deep-rooted for words. The Tuticorin reign of terror directed against the one Swadeshi enterprise which can prevent all the rest from being rendered futile by the refusal of British Steam services to help the carriage of Swadeshi goods has begun to shake the complaisant acquiescence of the commercial classes in bureaucratic absolutism. The collapse of the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company will mean that from Cape Comorin to Budaricashram the cry will go forth of "Swadeshi in Danger" with the result that the whole nation will awaken to the necessity of uniting in one desperate struggle to force the bureaucracy to surrender its monopoly of power. Swadeshi is now the dream and hope of all India. Loyalist, Moderate, Nationalist, all are at one on this point, all are agreed, that without Swadeshi there is no hope for the people of India. When it becomes evident that the bureaucracy is bent on destroying the only means by which Swadeshi can be secure of its existence, the greatest supporter of the present Government will feel that his choice lies between loyalty to his country and the hope of her resurgence on the one hand and loyalty to the bureaucracy and the destruction of his people and his motherland on the other.

When Srijut Chidambaram Pillai set himself to the task of establishing a Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company between Tuticorin and Colombo, he was taking a step which meant the beginning of the end for the British commercial monopoly in India. There are three departments of Swadeshi which have to be developed in order to make India commercially independent, first, the creation of manufactures, secondly, the retail supply, thirdly, the security of carriage from the place of manufacture to the place of supply. Of all these the third is the most essential,

because the others are bound to lead a precarious existence if all the means of carriage are in the hands of the enemies of Swadeshi. The difficulties experienced in East Bengal by those who tried to import Swadeshi goods from Calcutta in the face of the control of the railway and the steam services by hostile interests, are only a slight foretaste of the paralysing obstacles which will be thrown in our way the moment it is seen that Swadeshi has got the upper hand. The only remedy for this state of things is for the people of the country to organise steamer services both by sea and by river, so that all carriage by water at least may be in their hands. The carriage by land cannot come into our hands without a political revolution, but if we hold the waterways, we shall not only hold an important part of the system of communications but be able to use our possession of it as a weapon against British trade if the railway is utilised against us. The instinct of the country had seized on this truth and the organisation of Swadeshi steam services has been one of the first and most successful outcome of the new movement. The Chittagong Company and Tuticorin Company have both been a phenomenal success and, owing to the spirit of self-sacrificing patriotism which has awakened in the hearts of the people, they have been able to beat their British rivals without entering into a war of rates, for the British steamers charging extravagantly low rates have been unable to command as much custom as the dearer Swadeshi services. A network of Companies holding the water carriage from Rangoon to Karachi and the Persian Gulf would soon have come into existence and the waterways of East Bengal would have been covered with boats plying from town to town in the ownership of Swadeshi concerns. If the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company is crushed, this fair prospect will be ruined and all hope of commercial independence disappear for ever. The bureaucracy well know the tremendous importance of the issue at stake and have sacrificed everything, honour, justice, decency, to the one all-important chance of success. We also must awaken to the necessity of saving Swadeshi in this hour of danger. The time is a critical one....

Appendix III

The Tuticorin Victory

THE SUCCESS OF passive resistance at Tuticorin ought to be an encouragement to those who have begun to distrust the power of the new weapon which is so eminently suited to the Asiatic temperament. When the Boycott was declared in Bengal, the whole of the energy of the people was thrown into the attempt to get the Partition repealed and if that concentration of effort had been continued, the Partition would by this time have become an unsettled fact; but for two different reasons the attempt to unsettle the Partition was unstrung and the energy diverted to a different goal. In the first place, a great thought entered into the heart of the people and displaced the petty indignation against an administrative measure which was the immediate cause of the Boycott. Swaraj displaced the idea of a mere administrative unity and Swaraj is too mighty an object to be effected by a single and limited means. Secondly, the first magnificent unity of the movement was lost. The Mahomedans, lured by specious promises, broke away from the ranks and within the circle of the leaders themselves a division arose between those who believed in Swaraj pure and unadulterated and those whom policy or caution dissuaded from so mighty an aspiration. For passive resistance to succeed unity, perseverance and thoroughness are the first requisites. Because this unity, perseverance and thoroughness existed in Tuticorin, the great battle fought over the Coral Mill has ended in a great and indeed absolutely sweeping victory for the people. Every claim made by the strikers has been conceded and British capital has had to submit to the humiliation of an unconditional surrender. Nationalism may well take pride in the gallant leaders who have by their cool and unflinching courage brought about this splendid vindication of Nationalist teaching. When men like Chidambaram, Padmanabha and Shiva are ready to undergo exile or imprisonment so that a handful of mill coolies may get justice and easier conditions of livelihood, a bond has

been created between the educated class and the masses, which is the first great step towards Swaraj.

There has been only one other instance of a victory as complete for passive resistance against the might of a great Government. We refer to the struggle in the Transvaal which was carried on with equal unity, perseverance and thoroughness to a success less absolutely unconditional but even more striking from the strength and stubbornness of the enemy it had to overcome. We publish in another column a letter from a brother in the Transvaal on the subject. The conditions of political struggle in the Transvaal are different, the objects less vast than those of the movement in India. The transvaal Indians demand only the ordinary rights of human beings in modern civilised society, the right to live, the right to trade, to be treated like human beings and not like cattle. In India which is our own country, our aspirations have a larger sweep and our methods must be more varied and strenuous. Moreover, in the Transvaal the Asiatics form a small and distinct community in a foreign and hostile environment and can more easily rise above petty differences of creed and caste, opinion and interest; but in this vast continent with its huge population of thirty crores and its complex tangle of diversities the task is more difficult, even as the prize of success is more splendid. The unity will be longer in coming, the perseverance more difficult to maintain, the thoroughness less perfect; but the might of three hundred millions welded into a single force will be a potency so gigantic that the imagination fails to put a limit to the final results of the movement now in its infancy.

Meanwhile, the lesson of Tuticorin, the lesson of the Transvaal is one which needs to be learnt and put frequently into practice. We should lose no opportunity of letting our strength grow by practice. There have been many labour struggles in Bengal, but with the exception of the Printers' strike none has ended in a victory for Indian labour against British capital. Either the unity among the operatives was defective submissions, partial concessions. The Tuticorin strike is a perfect example of what an isolated labour revolt should be....

Appendix IV

EXCERPTS FROM THE speech of the Late Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi at the Silver Jubilee celebrations of V.O. Chidambaram College, Tuticorin

Sept. 5, 1972

Friends,

We are celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of our Independence. This College is of the same age. It is an occasion to pay homage to all those people—not only hundreds and thousands but lakhs and crores—who laid down their lives or spent years in prison or were beaten or had to give up their education in order that you and I and all of us in this country could live in freedom and build a new life for our country.

There is no part of the country which did not play a part in this great struggle, or which did not produce a leader, a hero or a great son whose inspiration still lights our path.

One such great son of Tamil Nadu and of the whole country was the one after whom this College is named Mr. Chidambaram Pillai. One can pay many tributes through words but I think the only tribute that is worthwhile will be what kind of young people are studying in this College and are passing out of it as full citizens of India to contribute to the greatness of the country.

In some ways the situation in the world has changed greatly but many problems and situations remain the same.

We are politically free but we still suffer from economic pressures from outside. We still have to face dangers on our frontiers from outside. The road before us is a long and very difficult one. And all of us have to ask ourselves the question as to how we can equip ourselves to fight this fight or go along this path.

At this function all our thoughts naturally go to your leader,

V.O. Chidambaram, who was a man of foresight, of wisdom as well as of practical knowledge and ability. His is an example for you all to follow. But could he, however great he was however wise he was, could he alone have won freedom for India? We are free today because we had the good fortune of such great leaders, but also because all over the country every Indian regarded this fight as his fight. Every Indian was prepared to sacrifice, to serve, to forget his own difficulties and problems in seeking only one goal—the freedom of India. Unless we have that spirit of unity in the country we cannot overcome our economic or other difficulties.

Each of our great men was far-seeing and modern for their age. Today if we have to show our respect and admiration for them we can do so by emulating their example. We should learn from them but also see how we can take the country forward by contributing something new, whether it is a new thought, whether it is to increase the efficiency of the country, whether it is to make the country better in sports, in arts, in music, in literature. We need to progress in every direction. And it is only the youth of today, the young people who are studying and who are going to come out of our educational institutions, who can give this new direction to our country, raise the image of the country, and take her forward in all directions. This is what we expect from the young people of today, not just to sit back and expect things to happen. Unless they do them, things are not going to happen. Things will happen only when the young people are willing to take the responsibility or willing to do hard work that is necessary, with their minds, with their hands, and their feet.

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